

Ep #128: Why Do I Feel So Guilty?



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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[The Widowed Mom Podcast](#)

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 128, Why Do I Feel So Guilty?

Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, the only podcast that offers a proven process to help you work through your grief, to grow, evolve, and create a future you can truly look forward to. Here's your host, Master Certified life coach, grief expert, widow, and mom, Krista St. Germain.

Hey there. Welcome to another episode of the podcast. It is officially my favorite season. It's been my favorite season for a while, but the pool is now closed, I'm recording this on Halloween. Our house, you know, which we just bought in June is spooky and it's fun, at least the porch is. And hopefully since I've never been in this neighborhood, we'll get lots of trick or treaters.

I've been told to expect around 90, which is more than I used to get in my old neighborhood, so I'm excited about that. And we splurged, and we're doing full-size candy bars, which I've always wanted to be the house that gave away full-sized candy bars, right? That's so fun.

So, we're doing that, and then also kind of fun that my dad has been teaching my kids how to weld. He has a shop and he's just gifted when it comes to all things construction, and so he's been teaching them to weld.

And so he made some really cool little spiders out of metal, and then my daughter made the coolest, little pumpkin spider stand so it's totally something she welded out of metal, all the spider legs and you put a pumpkin on top of it, so we're going to put that out a little bit later. So anyway, that's what's happening in my world.

So, let's talk about guilt. Guilt is one of the most common emotions that I see widows struggling with. I struggled with it a lot. After Hugo died, I told myself so many stories that caused guilt. That I should've pulled further on

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the highway and that I should've had that tire checked, that it was just my fault that the accident happened.

That then later in the hospital that it was my fault because I authorized the surgery that then later, as they were working to get him ready for, things just went all downhill and I blame myself for that.

I blame myself for a lot of things, had a lot of stories in my mind about how I had done it wrong and how I should've done it differently. So, I struggled with it a lot and it's just one of the most common things that I coach on with my clients too. So, chances are you might be struggling with it, and that's what I want to talk about in today's episode.

So, I'm going to cover where it comes from, why it can be such an issue, we're going to talk about the differences between guilt and regret, and guilt and shame, and just normalize some of it for you, and then give you some useful ways to think about it. Okay? Okay.

So, first, it's okay to feel guilty. All right? So, for those of you who are listening and you notice that you feel guilty I'm not going to tell you that you shouldn't feel guilty because if the truth is that you do feel guilty, it won't actually help you to think that you shouldn't feel guilty.

And if you told your friends that you feel guilty, they'd probably say something like, "Oh, don't feel guilty. You've done nothing wrong," right? "It's not your fault, you shouldn't feel guilty."

And we love those friends who care about us, and we know they just want us to feel better. But it's not a helpful message to hear that you shouldn't feel how you actually feel because, if you start to think that you shouldn't feel guilty and you are feeling guilty, then you'll just feel guilty about feeling guilty, and that's not helpful.

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So, it's okay to feel guilty, all right. If you notice your mind offering you stories about how you feel, then I want you to give yourself permission not to listen because we can never change something that we don't accept.

I actually have a whole podcast episode about feelings about feelings so if you want more support around that idea, you can go check that episode out. So, it's counterintuitive but what I will tell you about guilt is that if you feel guilty it's totally okay. You should feel guilty. Why? Because you do.

Byron Katie says, "When we argue with reality, we lose, but only 100% of the time," so it's okay to feel how we feel because to tell ourselves that we shouldn't feel that way just means we're arguing with reality.

Okay, here's why you feel guilty and how to process it. So, guilt, just like any other feeling, is just a vibration in our body caused by a story in our mind. Guilt cannot hurt us. No emotion can. And if we allow guilt to be with us, truly allow it, truly make space for it, let it be there it will process its way through our body.

We do not need to act from guilt. We do not need to try to get away from it. We do not need to tell ourselves a terrible story about how awful guilt is.

We can literally love ourselves through it and let the vibration of guilt run its course. And that whole process of allowing emotion can take as little as 90 seconds. It seems like it's going to be so much worse if we allow ourselves to feel how we feel. But the truth is that when we really allow ourselves to feel a feeling and we really go to that watcher place, and we see what's happening in our body, we're not thinking about our guilt, we're letting our guilt flow through us, it's not so bad.

This is why, and nobody likes me for this, but this is why inside of my coaching program Mom Goes On, this is why we do feelings first. Learning to feel feeling is the very first thing we do because I know that most of us

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don't come into the program with this skill. I definitely didn't. And I also know that even if people got only one thing out of the program, the skill of being able to let an emotion like guilt flow through you will change your entire life. And you can do it.

You can also tap. I teach a process called NOW, which I have a podcast episode around, but I also love tapping, Emotional Freedom Technique as a way to allow an emotion and if you want to learn more about that you can go to episode 87, What is EFT Tapping, which is an interview I did with Jessica Ortner who created the Tapping Solution app with her brothers.

So anyway, okay, so guilt is caused by a thought. Let me give you some examples of thoughts that cause guilt, maybe you will recognize some of these thoughts floating around in your mind. Okay, so, "I did something wrong," is a thought that will cause guilt, "I shouldn't have done that. I shouldn't have said that. I should have done it differently. I should've been a better partner. I should've made different choices," right.

Anything, where you think you did it wrong or should've done it differently, is a guilt-causing thought. I had all of those... Well, almost all of those thoughts. I didn't really have the "I should've been a better partner," thought but I had the "I did something wrong, right, I should've pulled up further on the highway, I should've insisted we call AAA, I shouldn't have gone on that trip without checking the tire, I shouldn't have even asked him to go on the trip," all of those things. A lot of should thoughts that I had that caused guilt.

Okay, so those are the type of thoughts that cause guilt. Now, remember guilt is different than regret. Sometimes what we think we are dealing with is guilt when actually what's happening is regret. I did a whole podcast episode on that too so you can go check that one out, but guilt is when we're telling ourselves that at the time, we knew we were doing something that was wrong, right, versus regret allows us the privilege of new data, allows us the privilege of hindsight.

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Regret is when, knowing what I know now, I would've done it differently, or maybe there might have been something I could've done. So, guilt says I did it wrong intentionally, regret says oh, if I could do it differently than I would, based on what I know now. I did the best job I could then but knowing what I know now, I wish I could've done it differently. Okay, so it may seem like semantics, but I think it's just good to consider that. Also, guilt is different than shame and sometimes we get these confused.

I think Brené Brown's work on shame is probably the most interesting work to me out there around shame so if you are interested in learning more, she has a wonderful podcast and every book she has ever written is amazing, I think. She's my style.

But guilt says I did something wrong whereas shame says there's something wrong with me. So, guilt is about the action we took where shame is about us as humans, so guilt is, "I did something wrong," shame is, "I am wrong, there's something wrong with me." Okay? Okay.

So, we've talked about it's okay to feel guilty. We've talked about why you feel guilty and how to process it. We've talked about guilt versus regret, guilt versus shame and now I want to talk about the way we typically respond to guilt.

So typically, we're either trying to numb it, pretend it isn't there, or we allow ourselves to act from it, to react to it. So, none of these are useful, right? They're all very common, all very human, and they are what happens when we don't just allow ourselves to let guilt be with us and flow through us.

All right, so while guilt can't hurt us if we allow it, it's also not going to produce the result that we want if we're trying to numb it or pretend it's not there or reacting to it acting from it, all right, so let's talk about those things.

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So numbing it, when there's an emotion we don't want to feel and when we don't know that our thoughts cause our feelings, we have the ability to get curious about our thinking and really look at the story causing the emotion to see if there's another story that we want to tell ourselves, and we haven't been taught this skill of how to allow an emotion, then often what we tend to do is try to escape it, right, try not to numb it out. And that just means for most of us that we distract ourselves with other behaviors, right.

And I've done podcasts on this too so you can go and check out the podcast I did on numbing if you want to learn a little bit more about this but basically, we end up using all kinds of things. So, for some of us its food, for some of us its business, we keep ourselves busy. For some of us it's alcohol, for some of us it's shopping, right. It could be overworking, it could be social media, excessive social media, maybe it's checking out with TV.

Any of these behaviors aren't inherently bad. It's when we're fueled to do them because we're having an urge to void our current emotion because either we don't know how, or we don't think we can handle it.

A lot of times we worry that it's just going to suck us into some dark hole and we won't be able to come out and so we start numbing, and that can have a really negative impact on your life. Different by the individual, and only you know if it's having a negative impact on your life. But if you're using behaviors to get away from your guilt, I just want you to know that one, lots of people do it. I did it, too. And two, that you don't have to do that.

Allowing that feeling to pass through you then gives you nothing to have to numb yourself away from and most of us just haven't learned that yet and that's okay.

So then, pretending it isn't there, a lot of us do this too, right. We just kind of know it's there, we can feel it, but we just kind of pretend that's it's not

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there. Maybe try to talk ourselves into positive thinking or to feeling better or we tell ourselves that,” It’s okay. It’s fine, everything’s fine.”

That’s what pretending it isn’t there looks like for me and for a lot of my clients. “It’s fine, I’m fine. Everything’s fine.” It’s fine. But if we’re pretending that a feeling isn’t there then what happens is that we don’t ever have a chance to look at the story causing the feeling in the first place. And if we don’t ever have the chance to look at the story causing the feeling, then for sure we don’t ever have the chance to change the story that’s causing the feeling.

And since it’s always stories that cause feelings, looking at them, even though it might not be comfortable in the moment, it might actually be kind of painful, is the only way that we ever get to change the story.

So, if you notice yourself pretending that the feeling isn’t there, I just want to offer to you that it’s not going to go away just by pretending it’s not there. Don’t feel bad about it. You’re just doing the best you can with what you know, and I have been there. But if you really want to shift the story then we’re going to have to look at it, and then we can get some leverage over it.

And the last thing we usually do with guilt is that we act from it, we react to it, we let it fuel our behavior, and this usually doesn’t create results that we want either.

And what it looks like typically is that when we’re feeling guilty, we do a lot of beating ourselves up, we do a lot of fault-finding, and sometimes we do a lot of hiding and isolating ourselves. When we feel guilty, we don’t really want to be out and about with people, we don’t want to be in social situations, and we don’t want to be really truly opening up or connecting with other humans, we tend to shut down, to pull in, to go inward. Think

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about what your body does when you're feeling guilty. You kind of contract and curl in.

We often don't take very good care of ourselves when we're feeling guilty and we're not really able when we're feeling guilty and we're reacting to it, our behaviors being fueled from it, we're not really able to receive what's available to us. So, if there's love or abundance, anything good, guilt will block it. Guilt will prevent us from being able to enjoy what's available to us.

So, if it's money and we're feeling guilty about it, we won't be able to spend it to enjoy it, to get anything out of it. We'll just be feeling uncomfortable with it and wishing we didn't have it and pushing it away. If someone offers us a compliment, guilt won't let us accept it. If someone offers us grace, guilt will have us deflecting it.

Guilt has us when we're acting from it, beating ourselves up and finding fault. And it's the darndest thing because it has us not only finding fault currently, it's like guilt will have you finding fault with yourself going backward in time. Guilt will have you finding fault with how you're currently doing things and guilt will even have you finding fault in the future, so you really just can't win when you're acting from guilt.

I haven't met anyone yet who's created results in their lives that they want when guilt is what's fueling their behavior. So, if you are trying to numb away from guilt, if you are pretending it isn't there, if you are acting from it or reacting to it letting it fuel your behavior, then the other option that I want to offer you is just processing the guilt, letting it be with you, allowing it, using the NOW process, using tapping. So that when we allow and process our emotion that's actually there, then we can look at the stories causing the guilt, all of those guilt-causing thoughts.

Then we can start to change our belief patterns because thoughts are just things that we've thought long enough that our brain believes them and

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they're kind of on autopilot now. And so if we have all of these, "I did something wrong, I shouldn't have done that, I should've done it differently," guilt-producing thoughts, they will become beliefs.

We'll think them long enough that they will become beliefs. Just the way that it works, just the way the brain does it. The brain's always looking for evidence, of our thoughts, and so it will start to build a case and then that thought will become easier and easier to believe and before you know it, it becomes a belief. It becomes something you will not even question.

So, letting yourself allow the emotion so you can see it doesn't hurt you and then starting to challenge the story, the thought, the belief, is what will give you leverage to change it. We can move from any thought pattern we have to another thought pattern we want but we can't do it unless we're allowing our emotions to be there.

We got to do that first, then we can create new neuropathways in our brain, because that's what a belief pattern is. It's just a pathway in our brain, it's just something our brain has thought long enough that it's now a pattern, it now requires no effort to think. And any of those patterns can be changed.

And so, what I also want to normalize is, if you are working to change a guilt-inducing thought pattern to a thought pattern that has you feeling peaceful or maybe free, it's normal to experience some dissonance. It can be done.

It doesn't always happen overnight and it's probably not going to happen as a result of you listening to this podcast. And that's important to know because if you don't know that, then when your guilt doesn't shift, you'll think you're doing something wrong. But the truth is that when you're working to change a thought pattern, it's like swimming through a terrible, miserable river. That's what my teacher always called it, the river of misery.

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So, it's like you're on one side of the river with this old thought pattern that's creating guilt and you want to swim to the other side of the river where you have a new thought pattern that has released you of that and it's creating peace or freedom or certainty. Something, something other than guilt, it could be a lot of things. And in order to get to that new pattern, to create that in your brain, to let that new pattern be the default pattern, you've got to swim through this horrible river of dissonance.

The reason it's horrible is because you will feel like you're constantly being pulled because one part of you might still believe, "I did it wrong," and you're trying to swim to the other side of the river where you believe, "I did it right," and a little part of you believes, "I did it wrong," and a little part of you believes, "I did it right," and your brain is trying to find evidence for both, and you don't really know what's happening because neither one feels... You don't feel at rest or at peace with either belief and you feel like you're being kind of yanked back and forth.

Both thoughts are believable, and your brain can find evidence of how you did it wrong and how you did it right. That's kind of a miserable place to be. And this by the way is pattern of all thought changes. Whenever we're shifting patterns, it's normal to go through this miserable place. It doesn't always happen, I shouldn't say.

Sometimes it's like a light switches and all of a sudden you just believe a new thought and you never believe the old one again. But I think that's the exception to the rule. So sometimes you'll be noticing that you're shifting your belief and you're letting go of the guilt and sometimes it'll feel like you're clinging to it.

And I also think and it's worth noting, that part of what holds us in this river of misery as we're trying to let go of the guilt and move to a new thought pattern is that humans don't like uncertainty. We just don't.

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We like certainty, and we don't really know what to do with this concept that bad things can just happen to people we care about. And even though it's really uncomfortable for us to blame ourselves for something, it's actually more comfortable to have someone or something to blame than it is to accept that no one was to blame.

So sometimes it actually feels scary or unsafe to let go of the story causing the guilt because then, what are we left with? If you don't have anyone to blame and we can't blame ourselves, then what? Then sometimes it feels like we're bobbing in the ocean without an anchor. So, I just want to normalize that a little bit, too.

One of the questions I'm always asking my clients is, is it safe to let go of this feeling? And it always seems like, "Well of course it's safe to let go of this feeling. Why wouldn't it be safe to let go of a feeling?"

But I'm asking that genuinely because usually there's a part of us when we're holding onto a story that causes a feeling, there's a part of us that doesn't believe it's safe to let it go and it's a good question worth considering if you're struggling to let it go.

You also might notice that just as you begin to believe the new thought, to believe that you did it right, that just when you begin to believe that you'll start to think or worry that other people will think you did it wrong or that other people will think that you are doing it wrong. And I just want to offer that believe it or not this is progress.

Our worries about what other people think are often just projections of what we think, and so when a little piece of us believes we did it wrong it will sometimes show up as a worry about what other people will think.

So, if that's happening to you, keep going. Keep going because when you truly settle into that new belief, when you give yourself permission to

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believe that you did the best job you could with what you knew, therefore you did it right, you will create peace for yourself, and you won't need other people to agree with you.

Your mind will let go of that worry so much easier when you have given yourself permission to believe that you did the best job you could with what you knew, and therefore did it right.

As I was writing this episode, I was thinking about a couple of women in Mom Goes On, and they know who they are so I won't mention their names. Maybe at some point they'll come on the podcast. But I'm telling you guilt comes up all the time so probably everyone in the program has probably worked on guilt in some particular form or fashion, but just there's a couple of women who both of them decided to end their marriage or left their marriage.

And when they did that, which required a lot of bravery and courage, then their husbands decided to take their own lives. And so, there's just been a whole lot of guilt that they have been challenging their own beliefs on and really working to let go of. And so, I was thinking of them and you know who you are but shout out to you for doing all that hard work because dang, it's work right and I'm just really proud of you both that I'm thinking of so.

Okay, in conclusion, it's okay if you feel guilty. If you're feeling anything, please do not tell yourself you shouldn't feel it. Give yourself permission to feel whatever it is you feel because that's how it processes through you, that's how you move to the other side of it. Emotions will wait for us. They will wait. They will keep getting our attention and so however you feel is okay.

We talked about how to process guilt, we talked about why you feel guilty, which is just because of thoughts, stories in our mind, and thoughts

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eventually become beliefs because our brains find evidence for them. We talked about guilt versus regret.

Guilt is when we believe that we knowingly did something wrong, versus regret, which is when believing that with hindsight we wish we would've done it differently. We talked about guilt versus shame and guilt says, "I did something wrong," whereas shame says, "There's something wrong with me."

And then we talked about the results that we create when we're either trying to numb ourselves away from guilt or we're pretending it's not there or we're acting from it, we're reacting to it, or letting it fuel our actions and why those three things aren't so useful.

And then we talked a little bit about how dissonance is normal when we move from one thought pattern to another. We talked about how sometimes it's hard to let go of guilt because, if we don't have guilt, we don't have anything to blame. And if we don't have anything to blame, then we're left with uncertainty. And that can be really hard to wrap our minds around and part of us just doesn't like that. And that as we are changing our own belief about how we did it, that we then might start to worry what other people think about how we did it.

And the answer to that isn't convincing other people that we did it right. It's convincing ourselves that we did the best job with what we knew and therefore we did it right.

Now, I don't expect that listening to a podcast about guilt is going to be what makes it go away, so please don't beat yourself up if you're still believing the stories in your mind that cause guilt. That's a very normal thing to do.

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It's hard to separate ourselves from the stories in our mind. But hopefully, you're going to go away from this episode at least knowing that the guilt you feel is only caused by a story in your mind, that you don't have to go back and change the past to have a different experience of it. Just because the past happened as it did, doesn't mean that you're always going to feel guilt.

It really is just the stories in our mind that cause guilt. And anytime we're believing in a story in our mind, anytime, whether it's causing guilt or any other feeling, it will always feel true. It won't feel like a story. And that's to be expected because the human brain is great at finding evidence of any thought if we think it long enough.

But that doesn't make the story useful, and usefulness is always the litmus test that we want to use when we decide whether we want to keep listening to a story in our mind or whether we want to change it, which we can do.

But if you're saying, "Krista, these thoughts that I'm having aren't thoughts, they're real. They're true. Everybody would agree with me." I just want you to know I hear you, and you're wrong. Okay?

I believe my own thoughts too which is why I have a coach who will always point them out to me. And so, when I say you're wrong, I say that from a place of love because the mind is super powerful and we can really get convinced that our own interpretations of what has happened in the world are true. But if it's not useful to you then you can change it, and that's what I want you to hear because it can be done.

In my Mom Goes On program, we do it a lot so if guilt is in your way of loving life again and you're struggling to let it go, I want to invite you to apply to Mom Goes On. I want to invite you so that I can help you with it because it doesn't have to be that way.

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Oh, and I almost forgot, I am so excited. I can't give you all the details right now but December 2nd, I will be offering a live private training. It's a training just for widowed moms, of course who are interested in working with me, but just for widowed moms and it's a training I have never done before.

New material, but more than anything just a different way of approaching it and I never taught in this way before. So, I've been working on that and I'm very excited, so when I have more information, I will be sure to put it on the podcast.

If you're not getting my emails, go ahead and go to coachingwithkrista.com and put in your email address. You'll see a little popup box. Put in your name and email address and that will make sure that you get the information as soon as the details are finalized, because you do need an invitation to come to this training.

It's free but you have to have an invitation, so go ahead and get on my mailing list if you're not already on it. All right, I love you. Whatever you've got going on, you've got this, okay? All right, take care and I'll see you next week. Bye-bye.

If you like what you've been hearing on this podcast and want to create a future you can truly be excited about even after the loss of your spouse, I invite you to join my Mom Goes On coaching program. It's small group coaching just for widowed moms just like you where I'll help you figure out what's holding you back and give you the tools and support you need so you can move forward with confidence. Please don't settle for a new normal that's less than what you deserve. Go to coachingwithkrista.com and click work with me for details and next steps. I can't wait to meet you.