

Ep #145: Why Friends Disappear During Grief



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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 145, Why Friends Disappear During Grief.

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, or maybe this is your first episode. It seems like we've had a lot of new listeners today. So, if this is your first episode, welcome. I am glad that you're here. I know I haven't done an introduction in a long time. So, I'll just take a second just to do one.

So, hi, I'm Krista, a Master Certified Life Coach, as the intro of the podcast probably already told you. I'm a widow, a mom, and I run a group coaching program called Mom Goes On. And I have been doing this work since 2018. I became a coach in 2017. My husband Hugo died in 2016, and he died rather unexpectedly. We were on a trip.

We were actually coming back from a trip, and we had both driven separately, and he was trying to help me change a tire on my car on the side of the interstate. And so, he pulled his car up to mine, and he was trying to get access to the spare tire in the trunk, and I was standing on the side of the road and texting my daughter to let her know that we would be late. She was 12 at the time, and a driver who we later found out had both meth and alcohol in his system did not see Hugo's hazard lights and just crashed into the back of his Durango and trapped him in between his car and mine.

Within less than 24 hours, he was gone. So, I went from feeling like I was on a total high in my life. Where my marriage was going really well, this was my second marriage. My first marriage had ended not so great, so he

Ep #145: Why Friends Disappear During Grief

was kind of my redemption story. He proved to me that you really could find someone who was amazing, loving, and wonderful, and really all of my dreams for the future included him.

So, that's how I came to this work. I really never intended to be a life coach, but what I found was that while therapy kind of helped me get back to functioning in my life. It helped me move through that acute grief that most of us experience in the very beginning. What I really needed when I got to a grief plateau when I got to that place where I felt kind of hollow and stuck, and I really wasn't making the progress that I wanted to make.

Other people were telling me I was strong, but I didn't really feel great. What I discovered then was life coaching, and it was so transformative for me that I actually decided within six months of being in the coaching program that I wanted to be a coach. That I didn't want to work in my corporate job anymore. That life was short, and I wanted to do something that was meaningful, so I went and certified.

Then, I quit my job, and since then, I have been coaching full time in helping widows. So, that's who I am. That's what I do. I have a deep passion for this work, and it is really truly my greatest pet peeve when I hear women who believe that once they have lost their person that they need to settle. Right? When we talk about getting used to a new normal that what we hear is, live a life that's less than what we want, and I can't stand it.

Because post-traumatic growth is real, it's possible for all of us, and there's just no reason that anyone listening or any widow out there can't get back to loving life and can't use what has happened as the raw material to create a life that's even more aligned with what matters to them, right? We can create lives that are even more satisfying and more of what we want instead of less.

Ep #145: Why Friends Disappear During Grief

So, no settling, okay? Alright, so, let's talk about why friends disappear during grief. Because we all know that in the beginning, it seems like they're right there with us, right? In fact, they're bringing in food, and sometimes they're organizing fundraisers or events, or sending flowers, stopping by the house, and maybe they're texting us and telling us to let them know if we need anything. In the very beginning, it feels like we've got all of this support.

People almost seem like they come out of the woodworks sometimes, and we get more support than we expected. But then, most of us reach a point where it feels like our friends disappeared, and we don't really know why. So, that's what I want to talk about today. Now, there's no way for me to actually know what's going on in someone else's life, right?

So, I don't truly know what's going on in your friend's minds and lives, but I've done this for long enough, and I've seen the trends, and I've experienced it myself. So, I'm going to share with you six reasons that I think that they do it. Then, we're going to talk about what you can do about it, okay?

First, this was the case with me before Hugo died. Most people have never been through something like this, and they have no idea what it's like. So, they are not prepared. I literally cringe when I think about how I handled loss in other people's lives before Hugo died because I was the friend that disappeared. I was the friend who acted weird, and it wasn't because I didn't mean well. It was because I had just never been through something like this, and I didn't have an idea of what it was like.

And along with that same thing, we live in a very—I hate to say it, but we live in a culture that's really illiterate when it comes to grief. Most of what people know about grief isn't even accurate. Right? We get all hung up on the five stages, which is only one of many theories. We don't talk about grief. We don't talk about death. It's kind of taboo for a lot of us.

Ep #145: Why Friends Disappear During Grief

So, when someone's going through it, and we've never been through it, and we live in a culture that's kind of uncomfortable with it, then we don't really know how to behave. So, that's the first thing that I think has happened for a lot of people. The second thing that's happening is that their life really has gone back to normal. Our life hasn't gone back to normal, right?

Ours still feels like it exploded or the rug got ripped out from underneath us. We're very aware of our loss on a daily, hourly, minute-by-minute basis, but other people aren't. And this is not an insult, but sometimes humans have the attention span of a goldfish. So, when we're out of sight, we're also out of mind. And because they're not in our shoes, they aren't thinking about what's going on for us as much.

It's not because they don't love us. They have their own challenges. Right? They have their own things happening in their own world. It's easy to forget about what's not directly in front of them. When I was in college, I studied communication, and some of what I studied was journalism, marketing, and public relations, those sorts of things. One of the things that I remember a journalism teacher teaching me was this idea of a story called a WHIFM, and what that stood for is, what's in it for me?

It was just one way to think about making a story relevant to the reader. That the reader, even if the story is, you know, really important in terms of something big happening in the world. People are really wired to pay attention to how it fits into their lives. What's in it for them? Right? What's the threat, the danger to their lives in this story? That's what their brain is hyper focused on. Is how does this thing impact me?

This is not to minimize your situation. This is just to say that your situation just isn't that high on their brain-perceived list of threats. Right? It's not the tiger that they're immediately worried about. They're focused on whatever's in front of them. Then, third on my list is that they often think you feel as good as you look. You know how everyone is telling you how strong you

Ep #145: Why Friends Disappear During Grief

are, and they look at you and they oh my gosh, you're doing so great, sometimes. They say things like this.

I think they genuinely think that because they can't tell what's happening on the inside. They don't know what your emotional experience is like because your emotional experience is happening inside of you. They can't feel your feelings. So, maybe you are a hollow zombie going through the motions, but from an outsider's perspective, it looks like you're getting things done. It looks like you're functioning in the world.

So, they genuinely confuse functioning with feeling good. And in some ways, I think we contribute to this, not because we want to, but because we don't really want people to pity us. We don't want them to think we're weak. So, what do we do? Often times we put our best foot forward. We try to act strong. Sometimes we try to fake it just a little bit to make them think they're doing better than they are, and they buy it. They think we're doing better than we are because how would they know unless we told them? So, I think that's also happening.

Number four is that oftentimes they just love you so much, and they're worried they're going to upset you. They don't understand that you're thinking about it all of the time, or at least very regularly. They don't understand that chances are very high that you would actually like them to talk about your person. You like it if they told stories and brought it up because you're thinking about it, and it's nice to know you're not the only one.

And because they don't know that, then they're worried they're going to upset you, so they don't bring it up. That's the logic in their minds sometimes as well; you know, if I bring it up, it will just make them sad again, and I don't want them to be sad again. So, I'll just not bring it up. I'll just avoid it.

Ep #145: Why Friends Disappear During Grief

Number five is sometimes, for some people, what you're going through is actually their worst fear. Most people don't want to think about their own mortality. They don't want to think about their partner dying. They don't want to imagine what life would be like without their partner. They do not want to put themselves in your shoes because it doesn't sound like any fun at all.

It sounds terrible, and they might not be doing it consciously, but unconsciously it's so uncomfortable for them to imagine that they just avoid it. And it's not because they don't love us. It's just they don't have the capacity to be with us, to be with that part of the human experience.

Then, number six is that they like us were also brought up to believe that feelings are problems. Right? Negative emotions are problems. That's what we've been taught most of us. They don't know how to feel good when you feel bad. They have no capacity to be with you when you feel bad. Right? And because they don't know how to make you feel any better, they avoid it. This is also why people say, you know, clichés and platitudes like they're in a better place, they're not suffering now, and don't worry, there's more fish in the sea, and it's okay, you're young, you're pretty, blah, blah, blah.

That's why they say these things, right? Because they don't have the capacity to allow us to feel bad. They want us to feel better. They don't know how to feel good when we feel bad. If you've ever been around or maybe look around in your friend group, people who are probably the most supportive and the people who aren't saying the clichés and the platitudes are probably the ones who have been through some sort of similar experience.

They know that, yes, it sucks. They know that, yes, it's hard, and they don't try to make you feel better. They are just with you when you feel bad. But we can't blame the people who don't have that skill. They didn't learn it; no one taught it to them. I have to teach it to most of the women who come

Ep #145: Why Friends Disappear During Grief

into my coaching program because culturally, we just didn't grow up with it. We were taught to get away from our feelings distract ourselves from our feelings. Right?

Use behaviors to escape them, but we weren't taught that they aren't problems to solve. We were taught to fix them, and as women, most of us believe we're responsible for other people's feelings too. So, we try to make people feel better instead of just letting them feel how they feel and being with them as they feel. So, that's why I think our friends disappear.

They've never been through it. Their life has gone back to normal. They think you feel better than you look or as good as you look. They don't want to upset you, right? What you're going through might be their worst fear, and they were brought up to believe that feelings are problems. There's nothing you can do about any of that, but here's what you can do.

First, you can give everyone some slack, yourself included, right. I don't know of any human who wakes up in the morning and tells themselves that their goal for the day is to be a terrible friend. We all genuinely want to be good friends to our friends. We want to succeed at life. We want to be loved.

We want to be accepted, and we're all imperfect humans doing the best job we can with what we know. When we come at it from that place, it helps us soften just a little bit. It helps us be kinder to others. And when we're kinder to others, we're more kind to our friends even if they're not treating us as we hoped they would. We actually feel better and more kind to them. It doesn't feel good to be upset with your friends and to be judging them.

So, it's actually a gift that we can give ourselves to cut them some slack. Then, I think we can reach out to them first. Right? Tell them you love them and want to stay connected if that's what's true for you right now. It's okay to be specific if you know what you want. Maybe you still want to be invited

Ep #145: Why Friends Disappear During Grief

to the monthly couples dinner; maybe you still want to have lunch once a month, maybe you still want them to invite you to coffee, maybe you want them to text you here and there. If you know what you want, it's okay to tell them, and it's okay to be the first one that reaches out.

Hugo and I had worked together at the same company. So, I remember when he died, sometimes something would happen in a meeting, and everyone knew him, right? All of the people in the room with me had worked with him. Some of them had known him longer than I have. He'd been there for 20 years. If I sensed that they weren't comfortable talking about him, I brought him up. I would bring him into the conversation because I wanted him to be talked about. It felt good to me.

So, by giving them permission to talk about him because I was the one that brought it up first then it laid a great foundation for people to tell more stories about him and joke about him, and include him in the conversation, which I found very comforting. Now, you might not, and that's okay. I'm just saying if you know what you want, it's okay to ask for it.

Then, the last thing I want to offer you is that you can always prefer them to episode 45 of this podcast. Right. Episode 45, called For Those Who Love Us. I recorded that podcast specifically so that you would have something to give people who love you and are trying to support you to better understand what you're going through if they've never had a similar experience. So, episode 45, For Those Who Love Us, would be great for that.

Alright, I hope that helps you. I also want to remind you that I just released a brand new free training called How to Navigate Grief as a widowed mom. I want to get it in the hands of as many widows as possible. There's nothing in it that you can buy. I do explain toward the end of the training how the Mom Goes On program works just a little bit, and kind of help people know

Ep #145: Why Friends Disappear During Grief

when they might be ready for it. More than anything, it's just about what to expect in grief, not that it's the same for everyone because it is different.

But, it's the training I wish somebody would have given me right after Hugo died. When I didn't know anything about grief and when I was struggling to try to read grief books and figure out what the heck to expect. So, if you would like it, go to coachingwithkrista.com and scroll down to the bottom of the homepage, and you'll be able to put in your name and email address, and we'll send it to you immediately. It's completely free, and maybe you'll know someone who could benefit from it as well.

So, that's what I have for you this week. Remember, I love you. You've got this, take care, and I'll see you next time. Bye-bye.

If you like what you've been hearing on this podcast and want to create a future you can truly get excited about 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 like you where I'll help you figure out what's holding you back and give you the tools and support you need so that you can move forward with confidence.

Please don't settle for a new normal that's less than you deserve. Go to coachingwithkrista.com and click work with me for details and the next steps. I can't wait to meet you.