

## Ep #187: The Emotional Stagnation Zone



### 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 187, The Emotional Stagnation Zone.

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. I am recording this a little bit in advance. You guys, I just got the sweetest gift in the mail from a client. It's really so sweet. You know how I say, 'you got this', all the time? She sent me the sweetest coffee mug, and a little mouse pad, and a little plaque for my desk and the most lovely note. And what's so exciting to me, I mean not only do I have the best clients, the most kind, most loving clients in the whole wide world.

But what's also so fun about this particular client, Miss Mary if you're listening, is that she's so new in the program and yet she's already using it and changing her life. And it's just really fun to watch. So, Mary, thank you so much for your sweet gift. And man, I can't wait to see what happens at the end of month six. Where will you be then? It's so fun already.

Alright, I want to talk to you today about the emotional stagnation zone which is the term I use to describe where a lot of us find ourselves emotionally speaking as widows. So we've talked a little bit about a grief plateau on this podcast. And if you haven't listened to that episode or that's a new term for you, you might go back and listen. It's episode 184, Identifying a Grief Plateau. But one of the things that contributes to our getting stuck in a grief plateau is how we approach our emotions.

And as you listen to this I want to make sure you know that I do not want anyone to feel bad when they listen to this or feel badly I guess I should say. I don't want you to feel badly, in fact I really hope you'll extend a whole

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lot of compassion to yourself. It's no wonder that we end up in the emotional stagnation zone that I am about to describe to you, because first of all, we were just never taught how to allow our emotions. For most people that is news, that we just weren't taught. Our parents showed us how to avoid our feelings.

Our parents might have showed us what it looks like when they react to their feelings. They might have yelled at us when they felt angry instead of role modeling what it was like to allow anger to pass through. They might have told us we had a big display of emotion that we should just go to our room and that it's best to handle that alone. Or how many times have you heard a parent say, "You're going to cry. You want me to give you something to cry about?"

These are the lessons that many of us grew up with around emotion. And so it stands to reason that we would already be at a slight disadvantage and would not have any other way of allowing emotion to pass through. Then we add onto that, grief, we add onto that a much higher amount of intense emotion than most of us are used to even needing to process. I mean I can't quantify it but you know it's a lot of emotion. So we have a lot of emotion combined with no skills to allow that emotion.

And then let's add on top of that, what we have been conditioned to believe, which is that feelings are problems. And then we're exhausted and we throw in what's happening in our body, our hormones and our sleep, and all the things that grief can do to a human body physiologically speaking. So we've got all these things stacked up against us. The very last thing any of us really want to do at this point in time is allow, or handle, or bring on anymore intense emotion. Can I get a secular amen for those of you who are not religious?

This is not what we want. So it makes perfect sense that we would then start doing things to avoid more intense emotion. And that looks differently

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for different people but sometimes that means we're using a behavior to get away from emotion. So maybe we're using our phones or scrolling. We're not with the people who are in the room with us. Or we're not even with ourselves. We're distracting ourselves from ourselves and our own emotional experience even when we're alone when we're scrolling.

Or maybe we're turning to food, or shopping, or maybe we're even cleaning, or organizing and just trying to stay busy. Because when we get silent that's when the emotion comes and we don't have the tools or the perceived capacity to handle anymore of it so we shut it out. We shut it out. Then conversely, we actually start limiting the amount of 'positive emotion' we could be feeling. I say quote, unquote because I think positive and negative are just labels that we have given emotion. So that's why I say quote unquote.

Regardless, there might be something that we have the opportunity to feel, connection, accomplishment, pride, joy, something that we would say is on that positive side of the spectrum. We have the opportunity to create that for ourselves but then don't because in order to do so we have to risk feeling something that we would say is negative. So let me give you an example, dating again, prime example. Now, you might not be ready to date again and that's okay. You certainly don't have to. You can be happy whether you are in a partnered relationship or not.

But let's say you do decide that you want to date again and you want to feel connection. You want to feel, you want to be in that partnered relationship again and you want to have that experience. There's something positive that you are 'seeking'. But also there is the potential that you could get rejected. There is the potential that it might not work out and you get hurt. There is the discomfort even if it does work out, there's just the discomfort that comes with getting back in the dating game again.

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So if we don't believe that we have the ability to handle the emotions that we might feel if it doesn't go the way that we want it to go. Then we will avoid putting ourselves in that uncomfortable place at all, which means we virtually guarantee that we don't get to experience the positive emotions that we want. Because we aren't willing to risk the chance that we might experience the negative emotions. So what happens is that over time we start using behaviors to avoid negative emotion and we start using inaction, which then prevents us from feeling positive emotion.

And we end up in this stagnation zone, this emotional stagnation zone, this band in the middle. If we lined all of the emotions up and we stacked them from the lowest vibrations to the highest vibrations, from despair all the way up to joy and ecstasy. We end up no longer in despair but also limiting joy and ecstasy, and all the other good stuff. We have less of the bad stuff but also less of the good stuff and we end up in this band in the middle, the emotional stagnation zone. This is where it's not too terrible, it's not horrible, it's tolerable but it's not great. It's definitely not amazing.

It's meh, you know that word, just meh? My kids use that word a lot, meh. Stagnant, no growth is happening there. No risk is being taken there. No new things are happening. We're not available to dream dreams, and pursue goals, and open ourselves up to new possibilities in that stagnation zone. But listen, it's kind of tempting because it feels safe, it's familiar. It's not great but it's familiar. And you've heard that phrase, 'the devil you know'. It's the devil we can end up really knowing and being familiar with and not wanting to leave.

It's the space that part of our brain, that primitive part, that part that really doesn't want us to get rejected or hurt, kind of thinks is desirable and wants us to stay in because it's known. It's quantifiable. It's safe but it's also not living. The emotional stagnation zone is not living, it's not thriving, it's just surviving. It's just surviving. And what makes me so freaking sad is that I know there are many widows who are not listening to this podcast and they

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are in that emotionally stagnant place and they don't know any better. They don't have me in their ear or somebody else.

And they have just resigned themselves to the way that it is. They have just decided that that is a byproduct of losing your spouse, and then that's probably their new normal and so they tolerate it. Because they don't know that it doesn't have to be the way that they live. And if this is you, let me tell you, this is not the way any of us have to live. Now, there's nothing wrong with it. If you want to be there, I get it. If you just need a break and you really just kind of want to checkout sometimes, I get it. Sometimes I do too.

But in terms of our broad full life, that's not where we want to spend it. That's not where we want to live it. That's not living, really living, the kind of living that is available to us. So it makes sense how we get there. I drew a little diagram and I'm using it in my program now and just taught it on a webinar. It's kind of the first time I've used it. And basically if you can imagine there's one circle going clockwise, one circle going clockwise. And so you can imagine this cycle, this circle, clockwise circle where an emotion starts, a strong emotion.

We don't believe that we have the capacity to allow it, so we turn to a behavior to avoid it. We pick up our phone. We check out with Netflix. We start shopping. We start working. We start distracting. We start doing something to get away from it. And what that creates for us typically if we do it long enough is a result that we don't actually want. Maybe the first time we pick up our phone, it's not that big of a deal. But ultimately, after a while in excess it will probably reach the point where we are not actually spending our time the way that we want to spend it.

We are not present with ourselves, we're not present with the people we care about. And then we now have more reasons to feel bad and more importantly, less belief in our ability to manage feelings, to allow them to pass. We actually believe we're less capable of letting feelings flow through

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every time we end up falling into the behavior that we really don't want, to avoid our feelings. Does this make sense? The emotion isn't the problem, it's what we do when the emotion shows up.

It's the pattern that we create when we decide to avoid the emotion and it's usually a very unconscious decision by the way. It's not something we are actually choosing in the moment with our prefrontal cortex. It's just a habit, but we avoid, we create something we don't like. We have even more reasons to feel more strong emotion and less belief in our ability to handle it. And this is how we get into the stagnation zone over, and over, and over we do that. And gradually the emotions that we experience become this smaller and smaller band.

It's easier to see with the visual so hopefully you're following me. Then though, the way out of this is we've got to reverse that cycle. We've got to do it differently. So imagine another circle but this one goes counterclockwise, the sort of strong emotions still starts. We don't change that, the strong emotion is still there. But instead of avoiding it with the behavior we actually allow it to pass through us. We actually consciously intentionally follow the process that I teach, the NOW process, Name, Open, Witness.

You can check out episode three if that's new to you, Name, Open, Witness. This is sadness, open up to it, give it permission to be there and then witness what is it actually like in your body. And then it flows through. Now, this takes practice. And I'm not saying it's easy and your primitive brain won't like it. It will feel counterintuitive. You won't want to do it. Sometimes you will get confused. You will start to do it and then you'll end up in the sad thought spiral and you will think that's feeling a feeling and it's not, I promise you that.

So it does take practice and it's not easy. And I know you know this, if you're listening to the podcast, this is what we start with in Mom Goes On.

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And we do that because I want to be there to help you with it. I know that it's not easy. I know that it's counterintuitive. I know that it goes against all of your programming. And I know that your brain won't want to do it, or at least part of your brain. So we account for that and we provide a supportive container for that. So that you can get enough repetitions in that you develop the skill of strong emotion starts, allow it to pass through.

Then we are creating a desired result. We're not now creating something we don't want because we avoided our lives. We're creating something we do want because we stayed engaged. We did the thing. We didn't let the emotion distract us, we didn't let it derail us. and more importantly when that happens what we come away with is actually an increased belief in our ability to allow emotion to pass through. We're literally developing the muscle of allowing emotion.

And we do it enough times that we stop seeing feelings as problems and we start seeing them as experiences that all we need to do is allow. There's something to learn there if we want, but there's never a problem to solve. It is not a problem when we have a strong emotion. And we increase our own self-belief in our ability to handle it. And then guess what? When we believe we can handle emotions, unstoppable, because all the things we want require us to feel emotions, don't they? They do. They do.

Going back to the dating, if you want to date again, you're going to have to be willing to feel vulnerable. You're going to have to be willing to feel uncomfortable, awkward, you could possibly and it might not work out, and then maybe you end up feeling regret, or maybe rejection. And yes, you also know if you've been listening to me that our thoughts cause our feelings and I don't even care because if you can allow the feelings we don't even need to change the thoughts.

If you just get good at feelings you will get yourself out of the emotional stagnations zone, you will be able to experience the full range of emotions.

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And you will believe that you have that skill and you can take that with you for the rest of your life and for all the big dreams that you might not even be giving yourself permission yet to be dreaming about. I hope that helps you. I hope you put it to good use. And I hope you go to the mirror and you stand there, and you look at yourself, and you say, "I love you and you've got this." I mean it, really go say that. I love you, you've got this. Take care and we'll see you in the New Year. 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 you can move forward with confidence.

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