

Ep #232: Why Happiness Sometimes Feels Scary for Widows



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Krista St-Germain

[The Widowed Mom Podcast](#)

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 232, Why Happiness Sometimes Feels Scary for Widows.

Have you ever noticed yourself feeling happy and then started to worry about it? What does it mean? Did I love them enough? Is the other shoe about to drop? Is it safe to feel this good? Am I doing something wrong in my grief? This is a common experience for widows. And in today's episode I want to talk about what's going on and what we can do about it. Let's jump in.

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 so sad to take my Halloween decorations down, so sad. I feel like Halloween season should just be longer because I have all these cute little skeletons and pumpkins and I'm pouting about it. But it is what it is, because here we are.

It is November, I want to remind you our Happier Holidays for Widowed Moms event starts today, November 6th, 2023. So if you have not registered it is not too late, coachingwithkrista.com/freeholidayevent. I'm going to go live for three days and teach you a tool each day. It will take no more than 30 minutes each day. Recordings available if you can't catch them live. And I really want to help you make your holidays easier. I know they won't be easy. That's not the goal. We're just trying to make them easier.

And the Happier Holidays event is here to help. So coachingwithkrista.com/freeholidayevent. And hey, if you're listening to this on Tuesday or even on Wednesday, you can still go and register and just catch up on the replays. And then you can choose, you can either do the free version or if you want to treat yourself to the VIP version, you can do that too. That also includes an extra 90 minute session on Thursday where

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I'm going to go even deeper and I'm going to teach and coach and help you out. So go check that out.

And then I want to read a couple of testimonials on the podcast that I found, that warmed my heart. I always appreciate your testimonials, your ratings, your reviews. And so I have two for you today. One is from 77trishm and it's titled. Thank you, Krista. And she wrote, "At 42 years old, I never could have imagined me a widow. My husband passed away seven weeks ago and to say life has been hard these last seven weeks would be a complete understatement. Because there are no words that could ever fully describe what early grief looks or feels like. Maybe agony comes the closest.

One day while scrolling through social media, a sponsored ad for Krista's podcast appeared on my wall. And boy, I am glad it did. I've been listening to episodes recommended for me during this time of early grief. Today's episode number 74, Everything's okay and Everything's Not Okay, really spoke to my heart and soul. I'm learning to live in the and, and this episode was a great reminder that as humans we get the blessing of the and, while I'm okay, I'm also not okay.

Krista, thank you for this beautiful reminder and thank you for your podcast. I look forward to listening and gaining comfort and wisdom from someone who's also walked the path of a widow. It makes me feel just a little less alone." Trish, you are welcome. I'm so glad you found the podcast early in grief. And thank you so much for taking time to tell me that it's helping you. That means a lot to me.

And then the second one I wanted to read is username deathnigh101 and the title is, This is Not Your New Normal. "Hearing Krista say, "Please don't settle for a life that's less than you deserve", was like having a life buoy thrown while I was sinking in the rough sea. After my husband died by suicide in April, Father's Day was crushing me and left me feeling hopeless. I came upon the podcast while desperately searching for others

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who would understand. After binge listening to hours of episodes, I signed up for coaching that next day.

Two months in and I'm starting to see a path back. PS Relationship with your husband took a weight off my heart." Relationship with your husband or your significant other is one of the modules in *Mom Goes On*. So I think that's what she's referring to. So again, thank you for leaving ratings, leaving reviews. If you haven't left one, I would be so honored if you did. It really does mean a lot to me and it's what helps people find this podcast. I don't know why the algorithms work the way that they do, but it really does matter when you leave a rating and a review.

Okay, let's talk about why happiness sometimes feels scary for widows. Now, if you're in early grief, this might not be something you need to hear yet. It might not be happening for you yet. But actually I think there's value in you preparing yourself for it so that when it does, you will have an easier experience of it. And basically what that is, is just this weird feeling that we have when we're used to feeling bad and we notice ourselves feeling happy. And sometimes it happens in the moments where we feel a little glimmer of happiness.

Sometimes it happens in the moments where we feel a sustained amount of happiness. Sometimes we just all of a sudden look back and go, "Huh, I'm happier than I thought I would be, is this okay?" And it actually starts to feel scary. I had someone reach out to me in direct message so I will not out her. She knows who she is. But in *Mom Goes On* I had someone send me a direct message the other day inside of our community and she was kind of worried.

And she said, "Hey, I'm actually feeling really, really good about my life. And I feel confident and I'm excited about my life. And I still don't wish he would have died but we're doing really well. I'm doing really well and I'm kind of worried about that. Is it okay? Am I doing it right? Am I delusional? Is this going to last?" I'm hesitant with her concern too. She was hesitant to

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allow it to be good. She was not trusting that good was okay, that happiness was okay. Maybe she's doing something wrong. Maybe it's not going to last.

So it happens differently for different people. It's definitely happened to me many times. So that's why I want to talk about it. I've also, I did another episode of the podcast, was kind of similar. So if this resonates with you, you might go and listen to the one I did called Upper Limit Problems. This one is a little bit different, but same general idea. So if you like this one you'll like that one.

Gay Hendricks wrote a book called *The Big Leap*. Highly recommend this book. And in Mr. Hendricks' book, he refers to this idea of a happiness set point. And I think is a very useful way of thinking about it. It's almost like we have this kind of thermostat. We have this level of happiness that we're just used to. We have this level of emotion that we are used to. When you lose your person very often you were used to something for the most part, not always, that felt better than what it feels like to lose your person.

And so, depending on how long you are feeling sad and lonely and grief and longing and yearning and all the things, despair. Again, it's different for every person. But you kind of get used to it. Like you kind of get used to the temperature of the water and it becomes what you're familiar with. And almost like a thermostat adjusts the temperature according to a top and a bottom setting.

It's almost like our body has a way of doing the same, sensing the same, such that when we get happier than we're used to being, than our current happiness set point is set at, it doesn't feel good. It feels weird. It feels foreign. We don't trust it. And then unconsciously because of that, we actually might do things that diminish our happiness. Some would call this self-sabotage. I have mixed feelings about that term. We might actually unintentionally bring our levels of happiness down by stressing out about them, by becoming anxious about them.

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So I think it's an important thing to be aware of. It might be happening to you. If it's not happening to you, hopefully this will help you get ready for it. Because really, yes, widowhood is a chaotic emotional roller-coaster for many of us. But also it tends to trend toward the least desirable emotions, especially in the beginning.

So doesn't it make sense that if we get used to that level of undesirable emotion, that amount, that consistency, that if we start to then notice ourselves feeling happy, feeling desirable emotion. And emotions aren't good or bad or right or wrong but we tend to classify them as positive or negative, undesirable, desirable. So however we classify them, when you're feeling the ones that you're inclined to not look forward to or like on a regular basis and you feel one that you do like, it's very unfamiliar, very foreign.

And when you live in a world that has ridiculous rules about grief, has brought us ideas like if we don't feel bad for a certain amount of time, or we don't feel bad enough for a certain amount of time, it means we didn't love them enough. Or it means that we're forgetting them. Or it means that we're avoiding our grief. Or it means that we're basically doing grief wrong or we weren't a good spouse. And heaven forbid other people might actually agree with those thoughts in our mind. Then we start to feel guilty about it. Maybe this means something?

Or even if we don't feel guilty about it, if we don't know that the reason we're feeling good is because of what we're thinking. And we haven't done that long enough that we believe in our ability to do it on repeat, of course, we're going to feel fear. We're going to not trust it. And we might have the sense that it's getting too good and the other shoe is going to drop, which PS I still don't know what is the other shoe. Can somebody tell me, where did the saying come from, the other shoe is going to drop? If you know the history on that, let me know. I could probably Google it, but I bet you all will tell me faster.

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The other shoe's not going to drop. It's just made up. It's not actually a thing. And then the other thing I think that's happening is that sometimes we have this kind of loyalty almost to being sad. Because we make it mean something about ourselves if we start to feel 'better'. So all these things are happening, which diminish our ability to enjoy the happiness we're experiencing and keep us wanting to revert back to that set point that actually doesn't feel great. Does that make sense?

So what I want to offer is, first of all, just knowing this and recognizing that that could be what's happening for you, I think is really powerful. Because if you're just at the effect of it, if it's just happening to you then you feel powerless. Not only do you feel scared, but you feel powerless. If you're kind of like, "I think this might be a happiness set point issue. This could be kind of an upper limit for me. This could be the part where my brain has gotten used to a certain amount of uncomfortable emotion.

And so because I'm experiencing some desirable emotion. I'm not quite sure I can trust that. This is the part where my fear brain tells me that the other shoe is going to drop." But what if the other shoe is just made up? What if I've done nothing wrong because this is happening and also this is what it is? It's just kind of like why in fMRIs, it's been studied that if you are experiencing an emotion and simply you label the emotion, you give it a name, that the part of your brain that senses fear actually chills out a little bit, and that can be seen in an fMRI.

It's the same thing here, where just the naming of it, I think will bring you some relief as it's happening to you. Now, I can't tell you that this happens in an fMRI. But I do think there's something to be said for knowing what's going on and having a term for it, recognizing when it's happening to you and calling it out in a way. And then that allows you to normalize it. That allows you to not make it into a big deal or worry about it or treat it like a problem to solve.

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That allows you to just say, “This is just the part where.” This is just what happens sometimes in grief when we get used to a particular amount of emotion we don’t like and we start to feel better that we don’t always trust that we can or that it’s going to last. Or that part of our brain that’s designed to look for danger and keep us safe might associate that with danger and that’s okay.

And then we have the opportunity to challenge any of those thoughts that we’re noticing. So if our brain is making our happiness mean that we didn’t love them or we aren’t loyal to them. Then we can decide to redefine loyalty. We can decide to redefine love. We can decide what we want to think about how happiness and our love for them can coexist. We can decide to believe that happiness doesn’t mean we’re betraying them or didn’t love them enough or doing grief wrong. It doesn’t mean any of those things if we decide that it doesn’t. And that’s when the mindset shifts can happen.

That’s when we can support ourselves. And that’s when we can start increasing our capacity to feel the good stuff because our brain isn’t coming along and judging us for feeling good. We’re trying to turn that thermostat back down to get us in that set point range. So just know, it might not have happened yet, it probably will. And when it does, you can acknowledge it for what it is. It’s a happiness set point problem. We can call it an upper limit. We can normalize that for ourselves, not make ourselves feel bad about it.

We can consider, what are the stories my brain is offering me? Do I want to believe them? And if not, we don’t have to. We can choose what we want to think about this and support ourselves. Alright. So give yourself permission. It is okay for you to feel happiness at all levels. And it is okay for you to feel fear when happiness shows up. It’s all okay. Remind yourself of that.

That’s what I have for you this week. I hope it helped you. Remember, Happier Holidays starts today. Go register

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coachingwithkrista.com/freeholidayevent and I will see you on the podcast next week. Alright, I love you and you've got this. Take care.

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 and click work with me for details and the next steps. I can't wait to meet you.