

Ep #258: Answering the Dreaded “How Are You Doing?” Question



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 258, Answering the Dreaded “How Are You Doing?” Question. If you’ve ever dreaded being asked what very well might be the most commonly asked question to widows, how are you doing, you’re not alone. And in today’s episode, we’re going to talk about exactly why most widows loathe that question and how we can answer it with confidence.

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. So before we jump in, I want to tell you two things. Just a reminder that partial scholarships are now available to *Mom Goes On*. If that’s something you’re interested in, you can go and apply for a spot in *Mom Goes On* coachingwithkrista.com/workwithme or just click on the Work With Me tab. You’ll see the application. Then once your application is accepted and we think it’s a good fit for you and it’s not going to overwhelm you, then you can ask us for information on the scholarships, and we’ll explain how that works to you.

Also, for those of you who aren’t quite ready to do *Mom Goes On*, who aren’t yet stuck in the grief plateau, but who do want support with grief. Grief Essentials is coming. It’s coming. It’s coming. I’m not going to announce a website yet where you can check it out because I’m not confident that it will be ready as of the time this episode airs, and I don’t want to get you too excited, but I do want you to know it’s coming.

And the reason I’m doing that program is because I want to provide a high end experience, high touch, lots of love experience for women in early grief. That very well sets you up to, gosh, just get accurate information about grief for starters, because that’s a problem. And then to give you the

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tools that you need to navigate what really can be such an overwhelming full body, not at all what we expected, really awful experience. And then set you up very well so that you would be ready for *Mom Goes On*. So right now we have that little gap there and I want to fix that. So it's on its way.

Okay, let's talk about the dreaded how are you doing question. Listen, first of all, I hear you. I don't think anybody looks forward to this question. I think it is one of the most common questions we're asked. And I want to talk about first, why I think we dread it so much. What's behind the dread and the ick that we feel in anticipation of being asked this question and when we're asked this question. And then I'm going to give you some options for how you might consider answering it, just to broaden up your options.

And sometimes you'll choose a different response based on the circumstances and what you would actually like to communicate or perhaps where you are emotionally, that's great, but I'll give you some options for that. So first, some reasons I think we dread it so much. I know for me, there were many times where I wasn't really sure where the person was coming from when they were asking. Were they just trying to be polite and they're just saying what people say or do they actually care about what was going on for me? Sometimes I didn't know.

Are they looking to validate their own existing opinion that she's doing great or she's struggling or she's so strong and they're wanting to hear me validate their opinion of how I'm doing? Are they looking for something, some gossip, something that they can tell others, “Hey, I bumped into her and here's what she said. Here's what's really going on.” I couldn't tell where they were coming from. Also, there's some people we want to be honest with, and there's some people we don't.

Even if we do believe we know where they're coming from, we don't actually want to be fully honest with everyone and show them what's going on for us. So that makes it dreadful in and of itself. Sometimes we don't

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actually know how we're doing. What is the context? How are we measuring how we are doing? What are we comparing it with? So it's a strange question to even be asked when you really don't even know what we're comparing it to.

Are we comparing it to pre-losing our spouse? Are we comparing it to the day after losing our spouse? What are we comparing it to? We don't know. Sometimes we're very conflicted in that part of us wants to think that we're handling it fine and part of us is kind of afraid we're not. Or part of us wants other people to think we're handling it fine, which is probably because we're trying to convince ourselves in part. And part of us is afraid that other people will think we're doing great. And then if they think we're doing great they perhaps will pull back and maybe won't offer to be there for us or support us or help us.

And then we'll be even more alone at a time when we're probably feeling pretty darn alone anyway. And then there are the things that we've been taught about emotions, what we've been socialized to believe, which in large part is that feelings or problems. They're problems to solve. There's a way we're supposed to feel. And the goal is to be happy all the time. We've been taught to believe that we should deal with feelings alone. Well meaning parents told us, “If you want to cry, go to your room.”

We've been taught that not showing emotions means strength, i.e., showing emotions means weakness. A lot of us have bought into that. And then as women we've been mostly taught to believe that our job is to take care of other people. And so if feelings are problems and we think we're supposed to deal with them alone and we think that not showing emotion is a sign of strength. And also we've been taught to believe that feelings are contagious, how we feel will somehow rub off on other people.

And if our job is to take care of other people then we can't show them what we're really feeling because it will make them feel bad. Then there's a

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problem to solve, or they will want to solve us. They will think we're weak. Do you see how the conditioning, the socialization feeds in? And so then it also makes sense that if we believe feelings are problems and if we believe you're supposed to deal with them alone or that showing them is a sign of weakness. We don't want to express emotions in public.

And sometimes you're not emoting at all until someone asks you a question like how are you doing? And then you're afraid that if you actually answer it, emotion will show up, it will come out. It will be, something will crack and you won't be able to keep it together. And we've been buying into this idea that that is not good. That might mean we get rejected. And if we get rejected, according to our primitive brain, that's the equivalent of death. It's something that we're hardwired to avoid.

We also don't like it when we perceive that we're being pitied, most of us. I bet you can probably relate to that. So if someone asks it with, “Oh, how are you doing?” That pity voice, we don't like that. Some people are asking because they want to feel okay. And I think it's important that we remember that. This is also why people say things that we receive sometimes as insensitive or uncaring or cliché, because they have been buying into the same conditioning around feelings that we have.

They don't know how to feel good when we don't feel good. So they want to think that we feel okay so they can feel okay. And so they will ask that question as a way of assuring themselves and feeling okay themselves. Which, by the way, I hope you will give yourself permission to not buy into because you are not responsible for another person's emotions. Emotions are not contagious. If they are not okay when you are not okay, that is a them problem, not a you problem. It's totally okay, as Megan Devine would say, for you to not be okay.

Also sometimes, we're thinking about the loss a lot typically, but sometimes there are those moments when our mind is not focused on the loss. We're

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actually distracted by the errand that we're running or the meeting we're about to go to. And so that how are you doing question interrupts that brief moment of respite that we might be experiencing. So there are lots of reasons, lots of thoughts that we have about these questions when they're asked to us, lots of discomfort that we experience when we're asked this question. So it makes sense that we dread it.

So I hope that sheds a little bit of light on the various reasons and maybe there are more that I didn't list that make it make sense that often we dread this question. And now I want to give you some options for how you might be able to answer the question. So I'm going to give you first some options for when you want to be honest. And sometimes we know what's going on with us and sometimes we really don't. But if you want to be honest, here are some ways that you can answer the how are you doing question.

You could say something like, “You know, I'm not really sure how to answer that these days, but thanks for asking.” Or you could say, “You know, I've been better, but I'm hanging in there.” Or, “You know, honestly, it's hard, but I'm here.” Or, “Today's a tough day but thanks for asking.” Or maybe, “It varies but today I feel okay enough to be out.”

If you actually want to talk about it with someone and you're being honest, if the person who asks how are you doing is someone you really do want to have a conversation with, then you might say something like, “Actually, I'd love to talk about it. Do you have time for coffee? Do you have time for dinner?” Or, “I could use some company actually.” Or maybe you're going into the meeting and you don't want to talk about it right now, “But, hey, the timing isn't great right now because I'm about to head to a meeting but can we catch up soon? I can share more then.” Those are honest responses. They're not super specific.

You don't need to give a lot of detail but there's honesty there. That's with the person you feel comfortable with. Maybe there are other times when

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you want to hold your cards a little more closely. And so maybe those options are something a little shorter like, “I’m managing, thanks.” Or, “Thank you for asking. I appreciate your support.” You don’t really give them any information about how you’re doing, you just thank them for asking and tell them that you appreciate their support.

Or you don’t really give them any information but, “Hey, you know what? I’m taking it one day at a time, taking it one minute at a time, one hour at a time.” Whatever feels more accurate because some days are like that. Maybe it’s, “Some days are better than others. Every day is a little different, but today’s okay.” So we can answer without giving a lot of details. We also, some of you might want to be sarcastic or silly, then you might say something like, “I’m just going for the gold in the grief Olympics. Thanks for asking.” Settling into my grief era.

You could quote Forrest Gump with, “I’ve learned that grief is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re going to get.” Or riding the emotional roller coaster, make a joke. You can lighten it up, “Not having conversations with inanimate objects yet, so that’s good.” You can just kind of be silly or sarcastic.

And then there are moments where you really want to provide an answer but change the direction of the conversation, steer where it goes, change the subject. So it might be something like, “Well, I’m having good moments and I’m having tough ones. Speaking of good. What’s good with you, or speaking of good, what good movies have you seen lately? What good books have you read lately? What’s good in your world?” Change the subject, ask a question.

So you answer it, ask a question, “No, I’m hanging in there. Thanks for asking. By the way how’s that, whatever, project you were working on? How are your kids doing? How’s your vacation? I saw you posted pictures

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of that trip you took to the beach. What are your summer plans?” Ask a question. Change the subject. You steer.

And I just want to encourage you to show for the most part people mean well, I believe this. People mean well. They have bought into a lot of misinformation about grief, just like we have. They have bought into a lot of misinformation about feelings, just like we have. They truly do not know how to feel okay when they perceive that we don't. There are a variety of reasons for this and it does make sense. So this is the default question and generally it's a sign that they care about you, generally.

So my suggestion is you assume that they care, decide that they're coming from a good place. Give them the information that you feel comfortable giving them and no more. Change the subject if you want. And then remember, if you show emotion, that doesn't make you weak. If you show emotion that makes you human. Showing emotion is not weakness. Holding it together is not better than crying. That's some nonsense. If they feel uncomfortable with that, that is not something that you need to own. That's a them thing. That's not a you problem.

Your job is not to make other people feel good. Your job is to take amazing care of yourself. It's all you can do. It's all you can do. And if one little conversation at a time, one little display of emotion at a time, we subtly change the way that people think about emotions, the way that people think about the public display of emotions. The way that people think about the goal of life is to be happy, which is just nonsense, because that's not what it's like to be a human on our planet, the better. And we can do that one little piece at a time.

So I hope this helps you. Remember, I love you. You've got this. Take care and I'll see you next week. Bye bye.

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If you like what you've been hearing on this podcast and want to create a future you can truly get 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 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.