Ep #289: Grief, Sadness and Joy: Lessons from Inside Out

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 289, Grief, Sadness and Joy, Lessons from Inside out.

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'm recording this a little bit before Thanksgiving, well actually the day before Thanksgiving. So just in case I don't want to work on Monday, I don't have to. Because otherwise it would be due on Monday to get it turned and ready for you on what is now December 9th, if you are listening to this on the day that it actually releases.

I've been thinking about doing a couple of episodes specifically on Disney Pixar's Inside Out movies, Inside Out and Inside Out 2, and we're finally here. I decided it's time to do it. So, in this episode, I'm going to talk about Inside Out, the first movie, which I think will probably forever be my favorite. And specifically, how it teaches us about emotions and how we can use that information to support ourselves in grief.

So, it's not really a metaphor for grief, but I just think it's so useful in grief, because the movie illustrates so much about how our emotions can work together, how no emotions are bad, what happens when we try to shut emotions out. And so that's what I wanted to talk to you about today. If you have not listened to my episode 265, Smiling at Sadness, you might want to listen to that one too. I talked about some very similar themes and referenced the movie quite a bit. That episode was all about smiling at sadness when that may not be our first inclination.

So, I would recommend that you go back and check it out. I also want you to really pay attention to these next two episodes, especially if you're

noticing that you're struggling with the holidays. If you're listening to this when it drops, then the December holidays are still upon us, and I think this will be helpful for you from that perspective too.

So, Inside Out. Inside Out is told from the perspective of joy, the emotion joy. And it seems like the movie is about Riley. It is about Riley, but really, it's what Joy learns as a part of Riley's team while taking care of Riley, while being in Riley's life. And so that's how I see it. I see it as much more about Joy and Joy's evolution, what Joy learns, because she starts in a very different place than where she ends up, all through the lens of what's happening to Riley. So, I'll share some of my takeaways, how I think they can help us, and then we'll see what you think.

So, when we first meet Joy, and please, if you have not watched this movie, do not listen to this podcast episode until you do that. Go watch the movie first. Trust me on this. But when we first meet Joy, she is clearly in charge and running the show. She has this kind of vibrant, determined, very focused effort to keep Riley happy. She is quite convinced that the importance in Riley's life only comes from Riley being happy. And she thinks that Riley's core memory is the little kind of glowing golden orbs, need to stay joyful, joy is superior.

They need to stay joyful in order to keep Riley strong and healthy and happy and stable. And Joy is not a really big fan of Sadness, the character Sadness. In Joy's eyes, Sadness is a problem, definitely a disruption at best, but really, she's a problem to be solved. From Joy's perspective, Sadness keeps messing everything up. When she touches any of Riley's memories, they turn blue. And whenever she's around and influencing Riley, she makes Riley feel things that Joy doesn't think are valuable and she doesn't want Riley to feel that way.

And we really see this when Riley has a core memory that Sadness touches, and Joy gets super frustrated, and she decides she needs to keep

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Sadness away. She needs to keep her away from Riley. She needs to keep her away from Riley's memories. She kind of draws a circle at one point and tells her to stand in it. She sends her away to go off on a task to keep her busy. She basically tries to micromanage and control every little moment so that things will stay light and happy because Joy believes light and happy is the goal.

Joy believes light and happy is success for Riley. But that's not how Riley's life works. That's not how anyone's life works, is it? So eventually what happens is that Joy and Sadness get thrown out of headquarters and Riley starts to unravel. And she actually kind of disconnects from herself and she disconnects from her parents because her emotions aren't really working together anymore. And so, she kind of just disconnects from all of it and kind of loses touch with how she's actually feeling.

And so, moral of the story, Joy learns that Sadness is not the problem. Sadness is actually the answer. Sadness is the solution. Sadness is valuable. And of course, then eventually Joy kind of turns the reins over to Sadness and Sadness saves the day. Sadness gets Riley back connected with her emotions. Sadness gets Riley connected back with her parents. And by the end, Joy realizes that she and Sadness need to work together, that Sadness has value, and that we don't need all of our core memories to just be about joy.

We can actually have joy and sadness and all the other emotions. We experience that mix of joy and sadness, that kind of goldy-bluey orb that happens at the end there. And isn't that what grief is like, the mix of happy and sadness? Happy that we have them, sad that we don't. Happy for the memories, sad that there won't be more of them. They go together.

And so, the main takeaways that I have from this movie that I hope will help you are that first of all, all of the emotions add value. In the movie we see this, each emotion is an individual character. So, you've got Anger that gets

mad, especially when a boundary is crossed, that keeps Riley safe. Fear is always anticipating all the things that could happen and seeing the scary things and trying to solve those for Riley to keep her safe. Disgust is trying to keep Riley safe from harm. Joy is bringing the joy and the lightness and the motivation and that kind of can-do spirit.

And then Sadness helps us connect. Sadness helps Riley connect with her family and Sadness helps Riley connect with herself. And so all of those emotions add value, and we see that. We see them all having their own flavor and we see them all adding their own value. And what I think we learn is that the problem isn't any one emotion. The problem is when we've got one emotion trying to run the show all the time, which also we see in Inside Out 2. I'll talk about that in the next episode of the podcast.

But when Joy tries to run the show, that's when things go awry. When Joy thinks she is superior and tries to control everything, that's when Riley becomes disconnected. That's when Riley runs away. And only when Joy and Sadness work together is when Riley comes back and feels connected again to her family and re-engages in this new life in the city that they've moved to. And I think that's the case with grief too. No emotions are problems. This is how I see it. No emotions are problems to solve. All emotions add value.

The problem is when one is running the show or when we think one should run the show, and it isn't. When we have decided that an emotion is bad or undesirable or not wanted or we've had enough of it. And I so understand from just a deep visceral felt I've been there way of what it is like to just be sick and tired of feeling some way. But what I've also learned is usually we're not actually letting ourselves fully feel what it is that we're feeling. Maybe we're reacting to it. Maybe we're trying to push it away. Maybe we're trying to get away from it. Maybe we're kind of white knuckling our way through it.

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And only when we actually allow an emotion to just be, that doesn't mean we have to be grateful for it, that doesn't mean we have to praise it for being there. It doesn't mean we have to fall in love with it but when we stop arguing with it and we let it be there, maybe we even learn from it. But even that isn't necessary. We just stop the resistance. That's when emotions get easier. And we see that in this movie.

We also see that sadness connects us. We see that when Riley is so disconnected that she runs away, what actually connects her back to herself and then allows her to connect with her family is when Joy lets Sadness touch the core memory and then it turns that bluish color. And then because Riley can come back to what she's actually feeling, then she can express what she's actually feeling so that her parents can see it. And then they can be with her in that, and they can connect over it.

Another place that I feel is just incredibly relatable, especially when it comes to how we relate with others when we are sad. I literally cannot talk about this scene without crying, you guys, it's ridiculous. I remember crying about it how many ever times I've talked about it. It's the scene when Bing Bong is sad. Bing Bong is just heartbroken because his rocket flies over into the dump and he's so sad that it's there because he had plans. Bing Bong is Riley's imaginary friend, and he had plans, and he was going to take Riley on more adventures, and he wasn't ready to part with his rocket.

And he's looking over the edge of the dump and looking down at his rocket and here comes Joy, thinking she's the solution. And she tries to cheer him up and she kind of tries to make him laugh and she tries to tickle him. And it doesn't work, it falls flat.

And if you have ever had someone in your life, come up to you after you've lost your person and tried to get you to count your blessings, look on the bright side, remind you that they're in a happier place or a better place. Or that you'll see them again in heaven or all the other things that people say,

you know what this feels like. You don't feel a connection with that person. You feel like they are dismissing you. They don't hear you. They don't understand what it's like to be you. You don't want to be talked out of your sadness.

You want to be seen in your sadness. You want your sadness to be witnessed. You want, if you're Bing Bong or a widow, it makes me just so teary. You want what happens when Joy realizes that it's not working, and Sadness comes up to her or to Bing Bong and Sadness is just there. And she just says some really affirming things that don't imply that Bing Bong is wrong for being sad, that don't try to talk Bing Bong out of the sadness that he feels. She's just with him in his sadness. She's just a witness.

And Bing Bong cries tears, those little candy tears that only Bing Bong can cry. And then very shortly thereafter, he's ready to go, ready to get back to the mission that they were on. And Joy is like, "What? What did you just do?" And of course, they kind of cut Sadness off and we don't exactly get to see what she was going to say. But we know, we know because we've been on the receiving end of that.

If you listened to last week's podcast episode on the righting reflex, the righting reflex is what Joy is acting on, that desire to fix something, to right it, which assumes that it has gone wrong. And what I just want to keep yelling from the mountaintops is that sadness doesn't mean anything has gone wrong. Sadness is a natural part of loss. Something went right in our eyes, in our mind, and then we lost it and so we're sad. That's not wrong. That's not something that needs to be fixed. It's something that needs to be tended to.

It's something that needs to be cared for. It's something that needs to be witnessed. If we could treat our own sadness the way that Bing Bong is treated by the character Sadness, how much easier would sadness be for us to allow? So much. We also see in the movie that it doesn't work to

avoid sadness. Riley tries, she tries to run away. Doesn't solve anything. We see that when we try to shove our emotions away or act like they aren't there or disconnect from them, that it's not particularly helpful.

I mean, maybe it might give us a little bit of respite from something in the short term, but in the long term, we end up disconnected from ourselves. We end up disconnected from others and probably creating a multitude of other things that we don't particularly want, that don't move us toward what we want in life. And so, avoiding sadness, while it makes sense that we would want to do that if we've had a lot of it, it just isn't all that useful.

I also love that the movie teaches that core memories are actually richer when they aren't just joyful. It's not that joyful memories are bad, it's not that. It's that there is a richness when a memory is both sad and joyful and that's what loss is like. It's both sad and joyful. The joy might have preceded most of the sadness, but the sadness wouldn't be possible without the joy. Sadness is what makes it all possible. Joy and sadness go together, and they don't cancel each other out. They just make things more meaningful.

They make a beautiful human experience, a beautiful and hard human experience. I think I talked about this in the last episode that it had not occurred to me before quite a while, I mean, gosh, how long has Inside Out been around? A long time. It had not occurred to me that Joy's hair color is the only character whose hair color is different than her body color. So, Joy is yellow, and Sadness is blue, but Joy's hair is also blue, which I love. God, I love Pixar so much.

I swear their movies are not nearly as much for kids as they are for adults, but that's basically a way of saying they go together. They go together. So, when you are wishing sadness away, when you are relating to sadness as a problem to solve, I hope you will remind yourself that sadness is not there to ruin your life. Sadness is there to help you process something that

you've lost, to remind you of what you care about, to connect you with other people. Sadness does not need to be something we relate to as something that we need to push away.

I hope that it is something you will invite to be part of your human experience, that you will be more inclined to allow it. I actually just coached someone today in *Mom Goes On* and again, tomorrow is Thanksgiving. And so, this will be the first Thanksgiving without her person and one of the things that she was saying was that she didn't want to feel sad on Thanksgiving and she really wanted to feel joyful. And I do believe it's possible that we can feel joyful, but I don't believe that joy and sadness can't coexist.

And I think for most of us when we're trying to make ourselves feel joyful, it's because we have some sort of resistance to sadness. We've learned something about it. We don't believe we can handle any more of it. And so, we're trying sometimes to convince ourselves to feel joy and I really do get that, and joy gets easier when we allow sadness. When we're trying to control it and it can only be one thing, but yet in our body is sadness, it's there.

You can think all the happy thoughts you want, if there's sadness in your body, it's there and thinking happy thoughts doesn't make it go away. Taking care of yourself, acknowledging that it's there, letting it be there, witnessing it, doing what the character Sadness did for Bing Bong. That's actually what helps the sadness flow through. That's actually what helps us look for in an authentic organic, unforced way to find the joy again and to see them both. I really do think that they can both be there.

We might not be feeling them at the exact same time, but we can oscillate pretty quickly. We can make space for all of that to be part of our experience. So, I want to encourage you to just maybe reflect a little bit about how you've been treating your emotions lately. Have you been telling

yourself that any of your emotions are superior to another? Have you been forcing yourself to feel something, but not wanting to feel something else?

And what if instead of trying to control all the time or push away, what might happen if you made space for all of them to just be there so that they could work together? I think it would be a much easier experience.

Alright, that's what I have for you this week. Next week, we'll talk about Inside Out 2. Remember, I love you. You've got this. 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 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.