

Ep #33: Perfectionism and Grief Don't Mix



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Sandy Linda

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Anne Lamott once said perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor, the enemy of the people? Is your inner critic hijacking your grief? Let's dismantle your grief inner voice and reclaim your power. Stay tuned.

Welcome to *Overcoming Grief*, a show for women experiencing profound grief and looking for support in healing and transforming their lives. If you are ready to heal after loss, create a new self-identity, take responsibility to do the hard things, and get massive results in your life, this show is for you. Now, here's your host, Master Grief and Life Coach, Sandy Linda.

Hello beautiful and creative souls out there. How are you all doing today? Are you ready for the holidays? Some of you may be spending the holidays, because it's a holy holiday month this month for the Catholics. So I'm familiar with it because my mom loved Easter. So this holiday season, I will be spending it with those who are not going to celebrate out in the restaurants or the malls. We'll be just going to the beach and walking like five miles to just reflect on our emotional storms and sunshine.

So as I was working with one of my clients, she was feeling overwhelmed and guilty about the upcoming holidays. Now her grief experience happened two years ago. But she was struggling with her emotions, and she was not able to express them openly with her family until she was able to get the pleasure to work with me.

She was explaining to me how she does not have the energy to have a perfect performance during the holidays as she is working to heal and manage her emotions with grace. She asked me how I could create an ideal performance for holiday gatherings while still trying to recover from her grief storm. When she said that, I said to myself she's talking about a perfect performance.

Before I continue, please join my insider community by hitting that subscribe button on my website and receive a valuable gift. Come and be part of the elite grief warrior squad. Be on the lookout for some exciting events. Also, I would greatly appreciate it if you can rate and review my show. Your feedback is invaluable as it helps me reach and support more individuals who, like you, are looking to move beyond the distress of grief and design a purposeful life. By

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sharing your thoughts and experiences, you are precious to our community. You're helping us all grow and live with intention. Thanks for being a part of it.

Okay, just want to get that out of the way and begin our show. So are you someone who sets high standards for yourself but knows when to let go of perfection? Or do you find yourself constantly striving for an impossible plan, even in times of grief?

Today, we're diving deep into the topic of perfectionism and how it manifests in our journey through grief. Now I have to say perfectionism can be a mixed blessing. On one hand, healthy perfectionists set high goals and strive for excellence without letting their egos get in the way. But when the inner critic takes over, it can become unhealthy, especially when navigating the complexities of grief.

Now there's something about grief that feels rehearsed, almost scripted. Society has unspoken expectations about how grief should work, how we should express it. But the truth is, we're all stumbling through it trying to find the right words or actions to comfort ourselves and others. Experiencing loss firsthand often sheds light on our own past reaction to other tragedies. For me to now have been on the receiving end of the imperfect grieving comforting has been a fascinating and humbling realization of how performative our grief response can be.

Today we're going to unpack the heart of perfectionism and grief. I will define toxic perfectionism, explore the negative thoughts it feels during the time of loss, and reframe our expectations about grief. Plus, I'll be sharing practical self-care tips to help manage perfectionist tendencies along the way. So are you ready to ditch the perfect grievers club? Let's get started.

Perfectionism became the topic of this episode due to a client wanting the ideal or the perfect planning holidays. So allow me to define perfectionism. Perfectionism, in the Googles, perfectionism is the practice of demanding a high quality performance from oneself or others, striving for flawlessness.

Now, I decided to talk about toxic perfectionism because there is healthy perfectionism, but there is some toxic perfectionism. It's the worst kind where

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you get so scared of messing up that you can't do anything at all. You become frozen and unable to take any action because you're so afraid of failing and getting it wrong. Why? The madness.

It can also cause you to hold back your emotions, and not express them until much later. That's a bad, bad recipe. There is a pressure to get over our grief so we won't feel less alone with our family or friends. But why do we allow ourselves to appear strong and put together while grieving? This pressure can have an impact on our mental and emotional wellbeing.

Now while my client is struggling to plan the perfect performance planning holiday, she had so much chaos in her mind and her family members. She's grieving, but her family wants to have this family gathering. Now, as she's grieving, she's unpacked a lot with me since she started working with me. She just does not have the energy to plan or attend the holiday gathering.

Even though she worked with therapists and now she was still feeling stuck, she wanted to unpack other emotional wounds that's been hidden, and she was able to release them. So this particular problem that she was experiencing was an opportunity to really release any emotional wounds that were holding her back. So she was fearful of being abandoned by her family members if she doesn't do the whole hosting of the holiday.

I asked her what is it costing you emotionally to say no? She said she did not want to upset her family members because she was considered the perfect host at these holiday events. So I asked her how do you know if they're going to be upset with you? Have you had the conversation yet? It's so fascinating to me about this part.

Did you know that one of the symptoms of perfectionism is persistent, negative thinking? Even if you are a rational person, you may still have irrational negative thoughts from time to time, and that's completely normal. But here's the thing. Thoughts are just thoughts, and you have the power to scan which ones are true and which ones are not.

However, if you let an irrational negative thought take over and make you feel like it's true, it can be disempowering. For instance, if you believe the thought

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that they might get upset because you're the perfect host at a family gathering, it can cause you emotional pain, sadness, and anxiety. This pain can trigger you to make a decision you'll later regret.

Then she told me that she should know better, and it's a pretty common thing to hear. But the problem with those should statements is that they don't always take your personal circumstances into account. They're just thoughts that tell you what you ought to do. When you don't live up to those expectations, it can leave you feeling guilty and ashamed, like you're not measuring up.

Researchers have been digging into the whole toxic perfectionism thing. What they're finding is eye opening. Is it the intense drive to be perfect? It turns out it's not just about wanting everything to be flawless. It's tied to some heavy stuff, like mental health issues, social anxiety, eating disorders, and even thoughts of suicide.

I am a mental health advocate. I've seen so many high pressure people dying to be perfect, to be belonging, to a community to fit in. When we constantly chase perfectionism to be socially acceptable while we grieve, we're on this never ending treadmill of disappointment. We're always feeling like we're letting everyone down. Well, perfection just isn't achievable. So it's crucial to be mindful of your thoughts and not let them control you. Can I get an amen for that?

All right, are you ready to embrace an imperfection and promote your well-being while you're grieving? Let's get into our inner critic and embrace the healing power of grieving imperfectly. Here are some self-care tips for being kind to yourself. Let me just remind you these steps are a little different because I usually tell you journaling or walking. Here are some more that allow you to heal through your grief in this particular way.

So number one is watch a comedy show or read a comedy book or call a friend that makes you laugh. I'll give you an example of my situation. When I was grieving, I needed something, an outlet that would allow me to heal, especially during the pandemic. I had the opportunity to watch the *Dave Chappelle Show* when it was on Comedy Central because it was on Netflix. So I watched that over and over again.

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But also my other favorite was *Curb Your Enthusiasm* with Larry David. I mean, that show is so hilarious. There are moments where I hate David, and there are moments where I feel sorry for him. The parts in there with grief and the show's characters really, really sparked my interest to continue on laughing through my own grief too, especially when Larry has his own theories on it on the show, but it's just for laughter.

Recently, there was an episode where Richard Lewis was talking about how he's going to put Larry on his will when he dies. It's such a funny character scene in that episode of them talking about death. Then two weeks later, Richard Lewis, in real life, had passed away. It was such a thrilling but a sad moment, but I just love what Larry David had to say.

He said that he was like a brother. He had that rare combination of being the funniest person and also the sweetest. But today, he made me sob. For that, I'll never forgive him. Just that whole collection with him and Richard during those moments of *Curb Your Enthusiasm* just makes you have tears of laughter but tears of sorrow. Look, he still made you laugh, but he's still in a moment of his grief. So again, watch a comedy show, something silly if it could help or read a book.

Number two is practice self-compassion. When you're feeling frustrated with yourself, especially when you're doing those inner critic talk, try speaking to yourself as you would to a friend in the same situation. Use kind and supportive language, whether you talk to yourself in the mirror or write affirmations on a sticky note.

Number three, engage in fun exercises. Now, I always tell you to walk but how about incorporating a physical activity into your routine in a way that feels enjoyable and even a little silly. Consider activities like rollerblading. I used to rollerblade, and I miss it because I'm getting up in age and I'm like I don't think rollerblading would be fun. But I'll try it one day. Playing frisbee, taking a dance class, or trying rock climbing. Rock climbing is fun. I did it in St. Lucia, and I will do it again. So find joy in movement that can help alleviate stress and boost your mood.

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Number four, replace should with could. Challenge your perfectionist thinking by reframing should statements into could statements. Instead of dwelling on what you think you should have done differently, focus on what you could do moving forward. This shift in perspective can reduce self-criticism and promote flexibility.

The last is practice self-acceptance, but I also want to reframe it, practice self-appreciation. Cancel self-criticism by knowingly acknowledging your strength and accomplishments. Make it a habit to give yourself one genuine compliment for every self-critic, recognizing your own value and worth can help build resilience and self-esteem.

So those are my five steps of you grieving imperfectly because grieving perfectly, is totally impossible. Lamott showed us how perfectionists oppresses grief, and the inner critic is the enemy of our voice. Loss is hard enough. Don't let perfectionism make it worse. Refrain those negative thoughts into empowered thinking. Don't let those inner critics attempt to hijack your grief.

It's important to be mindful of your thoughts and not let them take control. By the way, don't let those should statements get the best of you. You're the one in charge of your life, and you get to make the decision that works for you. Don't let those expectations from friends or family hold you back from being an amazing unique self. Well, that is all I have for you for perfection and embracing your imperfections while you are managing your grieving journey. Thank you so much for listening, and have a beautiful and wonderful day. Bye.

Thanks for listening to today's episode of *Overcoming Grief*. If you're ready to move into a new, rewarding life experience, and want more information about how to work with Sandy, visit www.sandy linda.com.