

Survivors Guilt

Erica Honoré & Sharon Brubaker

Grief Specialists

Tony ([00:02](#)):

Erica and Sharon, are sisters who began their grief journey in 2006, when Eric has 10 year old son, Austin drown together, they participated in a grief education program were so moved by this experience. They studied and became specialists so they could help the broken hearted find recovery. In 2015 tragedy struck the family. Once again, when Eric, his oldest son, Donovan was killed in a motorcycle accident, Eric and Sharon are committed to sharing their experiences of love, loss, and healing through this podcast. Now your grief specialists, Sharon and Erica,

Sharon ([00:41](#)):

Hey girlfriend, welcome back. You're listening. You are listening to the show where it's all about you, the griever and your broken heart. My name is Sharon, and this is my beautiful sister, Erica.

Erica ([00:54](#)):

Hi friends. Welcome back to our podcast. Healing Starts With the Heart, which is really all about helping you navigate your grief and your pain from whatever your loss is that has occurred, because we know there's more things than just death that can cause you to have a broken heart.

Sharon ([01:16](#)):

That is so true. That is so true. You know what, also, Erica, I love that we are fighting the war and we're actually out here having a conversation. You and I we're marching along. Okay. Let's talk about grief. Let's talk about a broken heart, you know, because we want to give our friends a safe place to listen to it, hear it, talk about it. We know for a fact that grievers, th the one thing that they want to do is talk about it when you and I get a bunch of women in a room and we ask them, how's your grief today? That one question can bring someone to their knees so quickly because we realized they didn't have a place to talk about it. This is that place for you.

Erica ([02:02](#)):

Right? And, and most people we know, don't, they're scared to start their healing journey. They're so fearful about what the experience will be like. Also, there's some doubt that true healing is actually possible. So putting this podcast out is such an amazing way for them to hear our story here. We shared snippets of clients that we have worked with, and hopefully there's something in there that they can identify with that we'll let them know. They don't have to be scared. We are absolutely going to hold their hand through every step of the process. We're absolutely going to be gentle with their heart and we're going to get them to where they will achieve true healing.

Sharon ([02:58](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. That's so cool. I love hearing that. I think part of the fear comes by because they're shocked about some of the things that actually come out, breathing some of the things that

they have to say, and knowing that as someone else in the room may have experienced that as well, or a version of it is so, so helpful, right? Yeah.

Erica ([03:21](#)):

It is absolutely helpful to be able to identify with someone and just to have someone understand. And this is the key thing that you and I say all the time. It's, if they're not saying, I know how you feel, right. But to say, I understand how it felt I was broken. I get it. I won't, we don't say we know how you feel. Cause we don't know how you feel. And we've shared a lot of the same loss

Sharon ([03:47](#)):

How that went. So we've been doing this for 14 years. How about when one of us says something that we experienced or that we went through and the other one, you never shared that before, that still happens to us today, that still happens to us today because we don't know what each other's experience was like. You were the mother, you were the mother who lost two boys. I am the, I was the aunt who lost two boys. I'm also, we were both daughters that lost a father. And that experience was totally different. And I'm the girlfriend that lost a very best friend. Right. And so, yeah, we understand what a broken heart feels like. I've never experienced a divorce. We both experienced breakup over romantic relationships. You know, we both experienced our relationship with our parents. We both experienced relationship with our brothers and sisters and all of those have grief with them, them, it just does friends. It just does.

Erica ([04:48](#)):

Grief is part of the human experience. Everyone will have a grieving event in their lifetime, and it's not always about death. So the more we get that information out because people go through life altering situations and they don't use the word grief to go along with it because they don't think that they're grieving. You're grieving. You are grieving. We're here to tell you today, if you've been through a divorce, if you've lost a job, if you've had a change in your financial situation, if you have a long-term illness or, or just a medical change in your medical condition, you are grieving

Sharon ([05:26](#)):

Or you just don't feel happy. Probably grieving. I think Erica, could you do me a favor? I think you need to get that on a t-shirt Now you are grieving. You are grieving. Not that sorry, ladies, that, that at some point in your life, you will all have a Grieving experience. Yeah, because I think if we put it on a t-shirt and everybody started to wear it, people would start believing it. And I think it takes away the shock of it actually happening. I mean, the shock that actually happens when, you know, okay, this is my turn, I'm having this grieving experience and I need to go through this. Hmm.

Erica ([06:08](#)):

How many times have we been with not just clients, but family members who we've met them under one circumstance you know, maybe they were there supporting us through our losses. And then, you know, they, they were very supportive and, and friendly and loving, but then when they have a loss of their own, like the shock and the expression on their face, like, Oh my God, I didn't know. It was like this. And then you and I were like, we're trying to tell you.

Sharon ([06:42](#)):

Yeah. Oh yeah, for sure. Yep. And how many times did we say You need to grieve that you need to grieve that, right?

Erica ([06:51](#)):

Yeah. You have the GTMs leave that stuff.

Sharon ([06:55](#)):

That was the clean version. But yes, I totally believe that, Hey, this is not even what the topic of our show is about. So I love that we got into that. The topic of our show is about being a survivor and having the feeling of guilt and pain after being the survivor, after surviving an accident, a natural, a natural disaster surviving an act of violence, you know,

Erica ([07:23](#)):

being one of these,

Sharon ([07:27](#)):

go ahead, sorry.

Erica ([07:29](#)):

My internet, you know, we've, we've talked about my low quality internet in my little small town. Sorry. in these challenging times we have a new scenario it's COVID yeah. When you have a family member and you've all gotten it and you survived, but someone in your family members doesn't one of your friends, does it, or one of your coworkers.

Sharon ([07:57](#)):

Yeah. What about surviving? I'm just going to continue with that list, surviving an illness that was fatal to others, surviving an illness that everyone in the family went to. The family party, everyone got COVID, but you didn't die right after a fellow drug user dies of an overdose, but you were there that day and you didn't die. When a parent dies from a complication of childbirth and you're the child best lived and are constantly reminded or told, right after receiving an organ transplant, you can have survivor skill because the transplant obviously came from someone who is no longer living in some cases after causing an accident in which other people die. You can have to go from that guilt from being present at a time of an accident that you could potentially save someone's life. Right. Right. When a child dies before a parent or the death of a sibling,

Erica ([09:02](#)):

For sure. So I want to go back to the where you said the accident where you had the potential to save someone's life. So a lot of our first responders deal with this when they were unsuccessful with, you know, trying to save someone like, I'm sure this is something they carry and then multiple times over because it, it continues to happen. So absolutely. This is something that they struggle with. And then I want to go to the last one. I think about this all the time for Jordan. Jordan is my youngest son. Who's older brothers have died. He is the only survive my only surviving child. And I I'm sure, and this is not something he and I have talked about in these specific words, but I know that he has some feelings about this. And I also know that after Austin died, Donovan had issues with this. He was the 12 year old brother. He thought he was supposed to keep Austin safe. Austin was the little brother. And he struggled with this for sure. And I am sure up until the day that he died, he, he dealt with this pain.

Sharon ([10:13](#)):

So the first thing that we need to do in addressing this subject is talk about survivors guilt. Yes. We need to break out the word guilt. And we did talk about the definition of guilt, what we teach a certain definition for guilt, and you guys can even Google it. It is in there. The definition of guilt is with intent to deceive or do harm guilt intent to deceive a person, another person, or do harm to them. So we always ask the same question when they say I'm so guilty. What's that question, Erica,

Erica ([10:50](#)):

Did you need to learn them? Did you intend to harm them?

Sharon ([10:53](#)):

Yeah. And if the answer to that question is no. Then we want to say, take the word guilt out of it. Yes, you are the survivor, but we're going to help you with the guilt. We're going to take guilt away. Now let's put another emotion in that place. Survivors, grief, survivors, pain survivors, sadness, survivors, loneliness, survivors, broken heart. You can have that, that you can absolutely have, but if you had no intention of deceiving or doing harm to that other person or family member, then guilt is not the emotion that fits in there. We try to use it as an umbrella of all the emotions and it just doesn't fit my friends.

Erica ([11:37](#)):

It really doesn't because like you, you did the scenarios that you presented. They're not something that people did on purpose. They're not something natural disasters. You know, floods. We've seen people that have been loss of life and all the full range fires, you know, California gets those terrible fires and there's loss of life. And it's not something that can be controlled. So you can absolutely change your verbiage so that you can put it in a way to reframe it to an area you can control. You can work on your survivor's pain. You can work on your survivor's broken heart. You can work on your survivor sadness.

Sharon ([12:23](#)):

Now, the other thing that happens with guilt, Erica is all the things we wish we had done better, different or more. So we work with a lot of sisters, a lot of girlfriends that are at the last moments or a car accident. The last moments with their family member, the last moments with their mom or before she died or their dad. And they start to review because our, our life is our brain starts to review that relationship. We start to review those last moments just before the accident, right? And we start thinking of all the things we could have done better, different or more. And that's kind of right in that crux of everything we could, we wished we had changed. Why didn't I go back to the house? Why didn't I call her? Why didn't I knock on the door harder? Why didn't I call the police? Why didn't I call the doctor? All the things that we wish we had done better, different, or more start to come up for us. Then we start what we think is feeling guilty when the truth is I, sometimes we just ask them the question, why didn't you call the doctor? And they have a whole list. That totally makes sense. Yeah. Has to be talked through and they have to understand it. This is grief. It is not guilt. My friend.

Erica ([13:38](#)):

I think that that is part of the misinformation that is out there in society. I think it is like a, it's like a concept that when there's a death, a tragic death, the, the people who are left behind should feel guilty about something, to feel bad about something so mean. They didn't say something, they didn't do it. We see it played out over and over and movies, all, you know, books, fictional books that we read. That's, that's not always the case. Right. And we need to start changing that dialogue and changing the scenario so that people can see your sadness about the fact about what has occurred is normal. And that's okay to have that. You're going to have that pain. It's not something that you did wrong. It's just a situation that just is.

Sharon ([14:34](#)):

And partly because they get stuck in the wise, they get stuck in the wise and excuse me. Oh, why didn't I turn back around? Why didn't I stay there? Why didn't I spend the night? Why didn't I get in bed with him and just hug him and love him all through the right we get through. We get stuck in the why's. And the, one of the ways out of the wise is talking it out and answering the question. But it's talking it out loud. It's not talking it through in our head because we're crazy all up in our head. Right. We got all these props going on. We have all these answers to your questions. A lot of times it's just talking the wise out loud and you and I do this all the time. They'll say, I don't understand. Why did I, why didn't I stay there tonight? And you and I are both say, well, answer the question. Why didn't you stay? And wait to hear the answer to it out loud, then they don't have that line anymore.

Erica ([15:30](#)):

Yeah. And sometimes we have even taken it to the point of if God knocked on the door right now and you open it and he said this, he answered the why is that going to make your pain any less?

Sharon ([15:44](#)):

Yeah. Yep.

Erica ([15:49](#)):

Cause for me personally, I know I have tons of questions, but it wasn't going to change the scenario and it wasn't going to take away how broken my heart was.

Sharon ([15:59](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. I think one of the things that will help is to the number one thing I think is to accept the feeling that you're feeling to allow the feelings and lean into it. Even if that feeling is guilt and you haven't gotten to a shed so we can break it down, leaning into that feeling and just feeling it and allowing it. And when I say lean in, I literally mean lean in. Like you literally have to lean forward. Cause grief really, really sucks. And you got to lean into the suck and try to see if you can feel what those feelings are and label those feelings. I feel sad. I feel lonely. I miss her. Why wasn't it me? Why didn't I get there in time? Why did I go back into the store to buy that bottle of water? It's all those questions.

Erica ([16:48](#)):

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Now Sharon, what about if there was a terrible accident and right before that occurred, you had an argument with that person. So you said some not nice things and then that's what you're left. Okay.

Sharon ([17:05](#)):

Yeah. So one of the things that we do is we help break down that argument. We actually start right there. We go to the Bennet. We get beginning. Cause a lot of times we'll find grievors that are having that argument or that weird phone conversation just before. And they don't really want to talk about it or think about it. And that's usually where the crux of the grief and the pain is right there. And you have to go after it. Right. And you have to answer the questions, why, what, what you would have done different or said differently.

Erica ([17:37](#)):

Right? And that's one of the things I love about what we do is we are able to break it down. We are able to walk through each part of the conversation and help them rectify it for themselves and, and get the healing out of it because people say, Oh, I don't want to think about that. Or I don't want to talk about it. But even if you saying you're, you don't want to think about it. You know what I'm about? You're still thinking about it. You're still carrying it with you. You're still feeling it. Even though you don't want to talk about it out loud. So we get, we give them such a safe space to talk about it and then help walk them through, through it piece by piece and help them get to the finishing point where they can begin to heal.

Sharon ([18:28](#)):

Oh yeah. I believe it. A hundred percent. 100%. Survivor's guilt is the label that it's called can stop you from actually grieving. It can stop you from healing. It can stop you from touching your broken heart, feeling the pain and literally changing your life forever. Survivor's guilt can send you off into a path that you could never come back from.

Erica ([19:02](#)):

So true because we, we have seen the way people try to manage and avoid their feelings. So drinking alcohol, using drugs retail therapy, shopping to access, working, becoming a workaholic. So in, in their attempt to avoid feeling the pain, they're going to stay at work and work excessive hours, alienating their other family members that need their support that need their love, that need their guidance. Starting really, really bad behaviors with you know, cutting off everyone, other relationships, just cutting people off because you feel in a, in a way you feel like you're not worthy of love because you feel like you've done this terrible thing. And so you don't deserve love. So you start to destroy all the other healthy relationships in your life. Like you said, you start down a path from something that you can't come back from.

Sharon ([20:11](#)):

Yeah. You said something the other day and you actually posted this in our Facebook group, but it was you grieve annually. It's not, it's not just grieving and putting your head under the cover and your life is forever over. You grieve and you live, you do both, you grieve, you learn how to go through the process. You learn how to deal with the resistance, the rejecting, the avoiding, you learn all of those things and you still live. And then once you're healed and your heart is mended, you live a life full of worthy and joy and laughter and you, you live.

Erica ([20:54](#)):

Yeah, I have. And I say this all the time. I will never be who I was before I lost my boys, but I am as close as I'm going to get, because I've done the work. I mean, I, I have clawed myself out of that pit of darkness and I am living still my best life. Yeah, it's possible. It is possible. And it's hard. It's not easy. It's not easy. You, you share all the time. How many late night phone calls you've had to sit on the other end. And I bawled my eyes out and I've cried and I've asked the why. And I have shared the thing that triggered me that day. And it's not easy, but it's possible. And you have to want it. You have to want and believe that healing is possible. I, one of our clients, I asked her to look at a video that I did on my own. And I said, Hey, can you go look at this for me? And I said, what did you think? And she said, I loved it. She said, I, she said, it's. She goes, people who know, you know, that it's genuine, but people who don't are not going to believe me,

Sharon ([22:01](#)):

What's video is it?

Erica ([22:03](#)):

It's the one where I'm sharing on the five-year anniversary of Donovan. And I share my personal journey and where I am now. And I just really want people to know it's so true. I did go to the dark side. I was there. I was resisting. I was sad. I was so broken. I didn't ever think that I would be here where I'm at today. So it was me sharing that message. And, and she said, people who don't know, you're not going to believe that I want people to believe it because it's real. It is so real. We're not selling smoke and mirrors. We're not here to tell people a fake message. We're not giving you the what did they call it? The the tonic, remember back in the old Felix surge, we

are real grievors who were devastated by loss. And we've made our way back here through an amazing set of tools.

Sharon ([23:08](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. One of the tools that you and I have just created, came out of the death of Donovan. One of the things that we didn't was a whole new experience for both of us was the resisting, the healing, the absolute resisting, the healing. And from that over the last two years, you and I had perfected a program called Processing the Pain of Grief. Let me tell you sisters, this program is for women. It was created for women. And it is just the very first conversation that you have to have about grief. We opened the door to what you need to be doing to allow the grief. And that's all it is. It's a quick mini course. We teach it in four weeks. It's Erica and I, you it's an online grief program. We support you every step of the way throughout the week. It's new, we're launching it. It's called processing the pain of grief it came about through Donovan. We love it. You can find that program on our website at healingstartswiththeheart.com. Also at healingstartswiththeheart.com. You can download the Grievors Guide, everything you need to know about grief. It's a free book that we wrote a mini book that you can get there. You can set up a mini session with us. We would love to have you be a part of our Facebook group. We have this amazing Facebook group where women get together and talk about their grief on a daily basis. Eric and I pop in and out of there, we do a thing called weekly Wednesday, where we give you a tip to help you through the week. We love that our weekly Wednesdays, and we're creating a community of women who need to learn how to grieve and we're helping them through the process. And we're so honored to do it.

Erica ([24:52](#)):

It's so worth it. I mean, I, I know firsthand the resistance that wants to come up because you don't want to deal with the pain, but the pain is still going to be there. So you have to deal with it. And this is such a, a way, a safe way, because we're going to be there to hold your hand. So please, please look into it and let us help you on your journey towards healing.

Sharon ([25:16](#)):

Thank you friends. Thank you for joining us today. And we look forward to meeting each and every one of you in person have a great day.