

Don't Tell Me to be Strong

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

Erica and Sharon are sisters who began a Grief Journey in 2006, when Erica's 10-year-old son, Austin drowned together, they participated in a grief education program were so moved by this experience. They studied and became specialists so they can help the broken-hearted find recovery. In 2015 tragedy struck the family once again, when Erica's oldest son, Donovan was killed in a motorcycle accident. Erica and Shannon are committed to sharing their experiences of love, loss, and healing through this podcast. Now your Grief Specialists, Sharon and Erica.

Sharon ([00:40](#)):

You'll never be strong enough up to muscle past this pain. You will never be able to show up with enough strength to muscle past this pain. However, you can win an academy award for the way you did the acting during your musing, through this pain, you're trying to get through this pain. And some people see that strength as a need for you to win the academy award for that behavior that you've shown up. And they absolutely show up with the academy award and they present it to you. And it often looks like this. Thank God she has you. You are so strong. What would she do without you? You were so strong.

Erica ([01:28](#)):

I don't know why that aggravates me so much. It's it's almost up there with, I can't even imagine. Like I don't, that annoys me too. Yeah. but yeah, when someone says, cuz they say it to me all the time, like my God, you're so strong. I don't know how you, how you're getting through this. I don't know how you're doing it. It aggravates me because you know what? Wanna have a choice. I wasn't given a choice. And two, I, I still have to go to the grocery store so I could feed my kids. I still have to get gas. Do I wanna be grow up in a fetal position? Bawling my eyes out right now. Absolutely. Yes. I don't want to do this. I don't want to live this as my reality. I don't want to say that I lost this loved one, but this is the situation. And you saying to me, I'm so strong. I almost feel like it's cuz that's what they wanna see. They don't want you to break down and ball your eyes out and curl up in the feeling fetal position. Cuz they don't know what to do when you do that. So they wanna encourage you to keep up your academy award winning. Don't let that don't let that

Sharon ([02:43](#)):

I actually thought different. I actually thought it was the exact opposite. And that's where I'll was gonna go with this. I think it's because to them you should be in the fetal position. They're like, how come you're not, your child just died. How come you're not in the fetal position? Or, or like you said, because that's their picture of what grief looks like. Their picture of grief is that you stay in the bed, you pull the covers over your head and you cry for a year or think about, think about it, Erica. Why did we wear black for all that time? You weren't supposed to be when you were wearing black, it wasn't to be strong. It was so that you can have your moments and people can allow you the moments it's like, it's almost like they show up and you're not wearing black. And they're like, wow, she's so strong. She's healed. Oh my God. That's awesome.

Erica ([03:36](#)):

Once she had to wear black for a solid year and she easily got healed. It just it's our, our misconception and the misinformation that is out there surrounding grief is also part of this problem. But I just feel like you gotta meet people where they're at like, oh, you, you know, oh, you're at your son's soccer game. That's so good. I can't believe you're out of the house. Well that we're not given a choice. We still have to parent. We still have to go to work and earn an income. We still have to do all the, the human things. But our hearts are absolutely broken in. I am devastated right now. I could barely function because all I wanna do is bust out crying. Cuz I don't have to buy Donovan. His his honey buns anymore. I don't even, he in honey buns, I don't know where that came from, but you know what I mean? I'm in the grocery store and I'm, I'm avoiding the cereal aisle because I don't wanna see the flakes I can eat every day.

Sharon ([04:44](#)):

Yeah. The other thing that happens is when you tell someone they're so strong, you are, you cut them off at the path of selling the part, sharing the part. That's really bothering them. You cut them off. So instead of saying, you're so strong or you look so strong, you know, it's not a, you and I have a list of the stupid things that people tell you. And I think it falls in number four, number five. I mean, it really should be number one. But you cut them off from really wanting to share how they're really feeling or to share the ugly. It's like, who are you protecting at that moment? When you tell someone they're strong, are you protecting yourself? Cuz you don't wanna hear the truth. Are you protecting them from not having to tell the story?

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

I think it's both. I think it's both. I think you don't wanna hear the ugly truth. It's like I think compared this before, it's like when you ask an elderly person how they're doing, you don't wanna hear about the, what they need. Depends. And they have going in for a colonoscopy and you know, all, you don't want hear it. You ask out a common courtesy, but you don't wanna hear the truth. And I think

Sharon ([05:48](#)):

It's you wanna hear? They just had hip surgery.

Erica ([05:56](#)):

You ask out of courtesy and I think it's the same thing with grievors. We say it because this is what we want. We want them to be strong. We don't want them to let the guard down and them to start sobbing in front of us because then we have to deal with emotions and nobody wants to do that either.

Sharon ([06:10](#)):

Yeah. And the other part is that they don't feel strong.

Erica ([06:15](#)):

No

Sharon ([06:16](#)):

They don't feel strong. They feel broken. They feel isolated. They feel lonely. They feel nobody else will understand exactly how I'm feeling right now. This room is full of people and nobody gets it. They don't, you don't understand when you say you seem like you're being strong. Oh, you're so strong that all they wanna do is scream at the top of their lungs. And Erica, if I didn't hear it one time, I heard it 100 times how strong I was being for you and how people just really admired that. And she's so lucky to have you. I was grieving. I was broken. I wanted to run out of there at one point. I actually tried to make an escape. I wanted to leave that place. I didn't wanna hear how strong I was. People don't wanna hear that. It's a lie. Stop telling that lie. Yeah. Even if they seem strong, they're doing everything they can just to survive just to get through that day. I guess it's an emotional that what you're

Erica ([07:19](#)):

Saying, it totally bothers me. It, it totally bothers me. I'm so aggravated right now. Just thinking about all the times people said that because yes, yes. I showed up at

the event, but it took me two hours to get out of the bathroom and to talk myself through it. After crying, I had to, you know, couldn't stop crying for two hours. Yes, I'm here. But it took everything I had in me to get here. And guess what? Tomorrow I'm not gonna be able to get outta bed. Cuz I used up all of my energy. To do this, to have you bring me this BS and tell me how strong I am. Thank You, anyways.

Sharon ([08:01](#)):

Being strong is not a journey to healing. When you get on the road of be strong, that's a journey to avoiding. That's a journey to avoiding your feelings. That's a journey to getting away from what you're feeling three years ago, when the saga shooting happened in Santa CLA, California, I was living there at the, at time. And immediately everybody came up with the bumper sticker or the hashtag saga strong. And you and I did everything we could to change that from saga strong to solve this together, cuz even the route 66 people did that. I think they did 66 strong.

Erica ([08:41](#)):

Oh from the Las Vegas bay shooting.

Sharon ([08:48](#)):

That's the biggest lie. You can tell anybody that is the biggest lie cuz you know what? Those teenagers were taking that as, oh I have to be strong. Yeah. I have to be strong to get through this. Not only is it debilitating, but it stops them in their tracks. So they were hearing be strong, be strong. Don't show your emotions. Be strong. Don't cry for Gracie. Be strong. Don't share how you're really feeling. And that is the biggest mistake we can make. Especially when our children, with our children, when we tell them that they are be to be strong is okay.

Erica ([09:24](#)):

Yeah.

Speaker 2 ([09:25](#)):

Solve this together. We're together in this.

Erica ([09:29](#)):

Our yeah. Our hearts are broken together. All of us are devastated from this. This is affected every single person in this community. Let's get together and talk about it. Let's show the emotion. Let's normalize, showing emotion. When there's a tragedy, not just put a, give a stiff up or lip. What is that saying? I don't even know what that,

but yeah, that's that that's, that's what put That's what people wanna see, but That's not Reality.

Speaker 2 ([10:05](#)):

What you, instead of saying be strong. You know what you need to say is you seem really strong to me right now. Tell me what's really going on.

Erica ([10:14](#)):

Yeah.

Sharon ([10:14](#)):

Are you putting on a facade? Are you trying to be strong? Very everybody because you know, you don't have to be. I'm here for you. What do you need to tell me right now? What are you? What are you? What are you covering up? How bad is this feeling?

Erica ([10:30](#)):

Yeah that's a total game changer.

Sharon ([10:31](#)):

Total game changer. There are no words right now. Let me give you a hug. That's it? That's it. Because when you set on that couch for one year after Donovan died and you stared off in a space and you in buffered yourself with reality TV shows and you avoided doing your laundry and you slept all day, were you being strong?

Erica ([10:54](#)):

No, I was, I was barely functioning. Was barely functioning.

Sharon ([10:58](#)):

Yeah. And so then to have someone come up and say, oh my gosh, you're so strong. You knew that they were lying. And you know, the other part is you gotta lie back to them. Yeah. To make them feel good. Yep. You know, get outta my face with that madness. I don't wanna hear this say when you're you seem really strong, but what can I do for you?

Erica ([11:17](#)):

Yeah. When, when you're grieving, you can be in a party full of people at a wedding. You could be in all these different social situations and feel like you're all by yourself.

Sharon ([11:30](#)):

Yeah. Grieving is the loneliest place on earth.

Erica ([11:34](#)):

Yeah.

Sharon ([11:36](#)):

It's the loneliest place on earth, friends, whatever you do, do not tell anyone that they are being strong or that you're admire or their strength. They don't wanna hear that. Grievers. Don't want to hear that.

Erica ([11:47](#)):

Ultimately, we don't have a choice. We don't have a choice. And that's what I think you guys need to understand if we could choose, we wouldn't choose this.

Sharon ([11:58](#)):

No

Erica ([11:58](#)):

We wouldn't choose this. No. So let's normalize people, being able to show their emotions and, and talk about the sadness instead of how strong you think they are.

Sharon ([12:10](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. And for the rest of my life, this is the message I'm gonna get out.

Erica ([12:14](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

Sharon ([12:16](#)):

Stop saying that let's normalize. Grieving. Let's be okay with the griever.

Erica ([12:21](#)):

Yep.

Sharon ([12:22](#)):

All right, friends. Thank you.

Erica ([12:24](#)):

Bye friends.