

COPING WITH GUILT

Guilt is both a source of challenge and a vicious poison. Guilt sours our daily pleasures and leaves us feeling angry with ourselves. It can paralyze us with indecision, inertia, or fear. Yet guilt also deepens our self-understanding. It prompts us to try to do better the next time around. It can also teach us to separate the trivia from the treasures, to recognize which things we hold most dear. Guilt never feels good, but it often leads to good.

- Try to understand your guilt. What did you say, do, or decide that caused you to feel guilty? Be truthful. Try writing out your thoughts and feelings.
- Recognize that guilt results from breaking the rules or standards **we** set for our self. Feeling guilty means we have let ourselves down, and perhaps those around us.
- Talk over your feelings of guilt with a trusted friend, family member, or professional who will listen without judging. Talk until you feel ready to let go of your guilt.
- Grieve. We need to grieve the past we cannot change, grieve over the haunting memories, and say good-bye to what will never be. By facing the pain we can stop running away and, ultimately, find healing.
- Remember that you do not have the power to control every aspect of your life, let alone the life of those you love. No matter how hard we try, there will be times in our lives when things go wrong, terribly wrong. Recognize your legitimate limitations.
- Clarify your intentions. Ask yourself: “With the information and resources I had at the time, did I do the best I could?” Guilt needs to be examined in its true light.
- Forgive yourself. This may be one of the hardest tasks you face in grief. Forgiveness is a slow process of letting go, healing the hurt behind the feelings, and reconciling our behavior with our standards. Make a promise not be overly harsh on yourself.
- Seek forgiveness. It may feel necessary to seek forgiveness from those you hurt. Face this task with courage and a contrite heart.

If you feel incapable of resolving your guilt or if it is overwhelming, you need to be willing to seek professional counseling. Good therapy can bring you objectivity, clarity and relief.

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