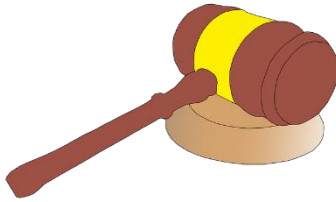


Exposure and Mental Health



Guilt can be a very painful emotion. We have all felt its weight and know just how difficult it can be to manage. We define guilt, for the purposes of this newsletter, as critical self-reflection leaving someone feeling deserving of blame. We feel we have done wrong and, whether our transgressions are real or imagined, we experience the guilt just the same.

Built for Guilt

Guilt can be good! As difficult as it can be, it serves some very important purposes. Our loves would be an absolute mess without it. We are social creatures and guilt helps us to maintain and repair our relationships. It helps motivate us to apply ourselves and maximize our potential. Further, guilt serves as a backbone to our morality, helping us to sense when we have done wrong, fix our mistakes, and avoid making them altogether.



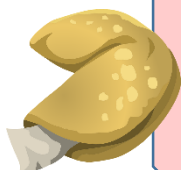
Blame, Shame, and Beyond

Guilt is very uncomfortable. It causes us emotional pain that can serve as a great motivator to make a mistake we've made right. In excess, guilt can feel paralyzing and can affect our mental health in a very negative way.

Shame and guilt are two very closely related concepts. The subtle difference being, that shame involves a more general negative perception of ourselves rather than a negative or regretful outlook on something we've done.

Guilt can easily become excessive, especially since we can carry a lot of guilt over things that weren't our fault. Guilt is a common component of a number of debilitating mental illnesses, including depression.

Important Lessons



It might sound like something from a fortune cookie, but the most painful life lessons we learn are often the ones that stick with us. Guilt over a serious mistake, especially a case where we hurt someone in some way can be very powerful. There are times where we can use this intense guilt as a reminder to avoid making a similar mistake in the future.



Guilt and Catholicity

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7).

There is very important wisdom here. We all fall short of our own scruples. No-one is free of mistakes or of guilt. Acknowledging our mistakes and seeking to repair them can have great benefits in our lives.

Managing our Guilt

As we've mentioned, guilt can be an extremely heavy emotion. If we are not careful, the pain of feeling guilty can lead to inaction. A parallel example can be seen with stress. Stress can help motivate us to get things done. Sometimes we may also feel so stressed that we become overwhelmed and feel unable to do anything about it.



When it comes to feelings of guilt, one of the best things we can do is to set out to make our mistakes right, and to repair relationships that may have been damaged by our own behavior. It may be time to apologize, to replace something that was lost, to refocus your goals, or to clarify your intentions. We use the guilt as fuel and mobilize ourselves to address the problems.

When Guilt Becomes Too Much



Is your guilt healthy or unhealthy? Is it helping you to behave with thoughtfulness and maintain relationships, or is it damaging your life and causing you undue pain? Healthy guilt is conceptualized as being proportionate and rational – meaning it's well calibrated to situation you are in. Unhealthy guilt is disproportionate, misplaced, and irrational. When we experience unhealthy guilt we may be feeling much more guilt than most would or feeling guilty for things that are outside of our control and not our fault. These feelings can be very difficult to resolve.

Guilt Fighters

What's Controllable?

Remember, our thoughts contribute to feelings and our thoughts can be wrong. Think on the situation you feel guilty about and make a list of the details that were under your control and those that weren't. The results may surprise you.

Get Some Perspective!

It may be important to readjust your own standards. We can accidentally fall into patterns of perfectionism. Perhaps we are holding ourselves to a high standard as a parent where any mistake leaves us riddled with guilt. Are you being realistic?

Now you Know

Consider the fact that you can only act on the information that you have at the time. Perhaps you now know more about the situation and would have acted differently had you known these details at the time. It's unrealistic to expect yourself to know all the facts.

Process, not Outcome

Are you feeling guilty about a situation wherein you were trying your best? Is it realistic to feel guilty for a negative outcome in a situation where you were? Consider what your intentions were and how you applied yourself at the time.

Have Self-Compassion

Remember, you are a whole person worthy of protection and self-fulfillment. Pursuing your goals, even if they are at odds with someone else's is valid. Have compassion for yourself. We all make mistakes and doing so doesn't make us a bad person.

Survivors Guilt

Survivor's guilt is a common experience when we survive a tragic situation that others didn't. If you are experiencing this, remember that surviving a tragedy doesn't make you culpable for it. These situations are often beyond our control.