

GUILT

Guilt. It doesn't even sound good to say the word. It feels awful. However, it's a word and an emotion that should be confined to when one has done something wrong. That sting of conscience when we could've done something better. We know it speaks to us and sometimes torments us unnecessarily in emotionally demanding situations. So why does it seem to dominate our thoughts in situations that involve our health or those of our loved ones - our parents, our children? Because we can't always fix it. We can't even do enough sometimes, because we get tired. Some things in life are not fixable and must be accepted as they are – which to us, may be unacceptable.

I wish I could write an article or a to-do list about how to cure guilt or how to avoid it altogether. There are plenty of advice books written about it. In fact, it seems common today that we're encouraged *not* to feel guilty about much of anything. We're encouraged to 'do what makes us feel good,' 'put self first,' 'live no regrets.' A measure of guilt can serve to motivate and cause one to rethink his/her approach to life's circumstance surrounding the health issue, the time dedicated to thoughts about it, and the direction of treatment.

Can we be more compassionate towards a loved one? Can we be more helpful in a practical way? Can we visit and hold a hand and say nothing at all - just be there? Can we be more proactive in the medical process? Certainly, doing more helps one to feel better, particularly when it doesn't cost us anything but a bit of our time, and often our efforts are met with acceptance and appreciation. It can feel like a huge challenge to do all we can for ourselves if we're ill, but it promotes self confidence and a positive mind set; yet is much easier said than done. The equal challenge is in caring for another where it may not be met with gratitude, but with resistance and resentment. It seems those situations present some of the greatest and deepest emotional challenges within the family circle, which we all may eventually face to a certain extent.

With children, it seems as soon as they're born, we're handed a new baby and a hearty dose of guilt simultaneously. Am I doing enough? Am I doing too much and spoiling our child? Will I add to his/her inability to figure things out and cope maturely by over indulging him/her to satisfy my own nagging pangs of guilt? Where's the balance? Each family's dynamics and situation is different. Some marinate in guilt and some are so opposed to it, it's not even entertained as a passing thought. Which is healthier? Obviously, somewhere in the middle. Each of us must decide for ourselves.

Ultimately, not beating ourselves up over situations we cannot change or cure is best. Getting support from those outside our immediate family circle sometimes helps us to gain a more reasonable perspective. Time to ourselves is necessary to recoup and regroup when dealing with an ill family member. A bit of humility in recognizing our own physical, mental and emotional abilities, as well as limitations, is key as well.



Guilt - save it for when you totally blow it. A sincere apology and effort to remedy and a resolve to try harder heals in most every circumstance. How powerful two little words are: "I'm sorry." Even if it's to express sorrow over another's plight or to acknowledge your own inadequacies at dealing with a health situation that doesn't come with a handbook of instructions.

The healthier mode of thought-praising yourself for trying your best, self-sacrifice and for just being there. Sometimes, informing the one you're helping of your own true limited power and weaknesses unites thinking and lessens stress and unreasonable expectations. When we are enlisted to help another, informing them *how* we are able to assist instead of being unable to live up to another's expectations provides clarity in both directions.

Good health to you and yours!

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