



TAPS
Institute for Hope and Healing

Coping with Guilt when You're Grieving
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


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Presented by Boeing 



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Strong emotions, difficult stories...


- The daughter of an 85-year-old woman with advanced cancer flies across the country to be with her mother. After being told by the doctor that—although no one knows for sure—her mom will likely live for a few more months, she reluctantly returns home due to work obligations. Her mother dies a week later.
- The mother of a 32-year-old man with a history of depression calls and speaks with her son on the phone at least once a week. For months, he has been reporting doing very well. But, shortly after one of their calls, she finds out that her son has died by suicide.
- A soldier in the Vietnam war promises to bring one of his buddies out of the war zone alive. But, after his decision to lead a group of men along a particular path through the terrain, they are ambushed and his friend is killed.







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The stages of grief

- Elisabeth Kübler-Ross



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The (non-)stages of grief

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

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Should guilt be one of the stages?

- Guilt is **normative** in the grief process
- Most studies show that between 30 and 60 percent of bereaved individuals experience guilt; the number is as high as 90 percent in some studies
- These percentages are on par with the other experiences captured in the stages of grief


(Lee, Stroebe, Chan, & Chow, 2014)

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What is guilt?


- Guilt is the feeling you get when you perceive that you did something wrong.
- Shame is the feeling that your *whole self* is wrong, and it might not be related to a specific action or event.



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Guilt is a feeling, not a fact


- People often assume that if they *feel* guilty, then they must have done something wrong
- Although it's important to acknowledge and honor our feelings, it's also important to realize that our **feelings don't always accurately reflect reality**
- Guilt is often a sign that you're a good person



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Feelings don't always reflect reality...

Worry?
Depression?
Anger?



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A pernicious side-effect of language...



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In other words...
Feeling guilty doesn't mean we are guilty

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In other words...
We can often be way too hard on ourselves

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#1 - "I should have said or done more."

- Sometimes called the "tyranny of the shoulds"
- We may feel we *should* have expressed more appreciation for our loved ones, *should* have said "I love you" more often, or *should* have been there at the time of death
- It's a fact: Most people leave something undone or unsaid in their relationships
- But, we often forget to remind ourselves of all the things we ***did do*** and/or ***still can do***




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#2 - "I made the wrong decision."

- Many people blame themselves for making a wrong decision with regard to their loved one
- But, when we blame ourselves for making the wrong decision, we often do it from the standpoint of *what we know now*, rather than what we knew at the time
- When we feel we've made a wrong choice, it's important to ask ourselves whether we made the best decision we could given the information we had *at the time*. **No one is to blame for not seeing the future**



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Forgive yourself for not knowing what you didn't know before you learned it.
- Maya Angelou

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#3 - "I'm a terrible person."

- Guilt vs. shame
- Just like guilt, shame often results from being way too hard on ourselves; unfortunately, it is sometimes difficult for people who feel this way to see this clearly
- Importance of talking with someone about it
- It can sometimes help to ask yourself, "What would I say to a close friend who was going through the same thing as me?"
- Consider seeking psychotherapy, if appropriate



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Search in all directions with your awareness and you will find no one dearer than yourself.
- The Buddha

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About the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing®

Launched in March 2018 through an alliance with HFA, the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing® serves as a resource and training center, providing programs for both professionals working in the field of grief and loss and the public.



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Upcoming TAPS Institute Programs

March 23 **Grieving Styles and Family Dynamics: Communicating with Children and Teens**
Live Webinar, Noon-1:00 p.m. ET
Andy McNiel, MA, Senior Advisor, TAPS

April 20 **The Helper's Journey: Empathy, Compassion, and the Challenge of Caring in a Challenging Time**
Live Webinar, Noon-1:30 p.m. ET (1.5 CEs Available)
Dale Larson, PhD, Santa Clara University

April 27 **Coping with Special Days: Finding Comfort in Remembering**
Live Webinar, Noon-1:00 p.m. ET
Patti Anewalt, PhD, LPC, FT, Director, Pathways Center for Grief & Loss

Visit taps.org/institute to learn more and RSVP!

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Upcoming TAPS Institute Programs

May 20 **Grief Leadership: Examples from the Life and Service of Captain America**
Live Webinar, Noon-1:30 p.m. ET (1.5 CEs Available)
David F. Carey, MS, BS, LTC, U.S. Army (Ret.), Combat-Veteran (OIF/OEF)
Stephen J. Cozza, MD, DFAACAP, DFAPA, COL, U.S. Army (Ret.)
Jill Harrington-LaMorie, DSW, LCSW, author/editor, *Superhero Grief*

June 29 **EMDR Demystified**
Live Webinar, Noon-1:30 p.m. ET (1.5 CEs Available)
Howard Lipke, PhD, editorial board member, *EMDR Journal of Practice and Research*

Visit taps.org/institute to learn more and RSVP!

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