

GRIEF AND RELATED EMOTIONS

DEFINITIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

Grief	versus	Depression
<i>There is an identifiable loss.</i>		<i>The loss may or may not be identifiable.</i>
<i>The focus is on the loss.</i>		<i>The focus is on the self.</i>
<i>There are fluctuations in the ability to feel pleasure.</i>		<i>Sustained periods of inability to feel pleasure.</i>
<i>There are variable physical symptoms.</i>		<i>There are persistent self-destructive responses.</i>
<i>Closeness of others is usually reassuring.</i>		<i>The depressed feels persistent isolation.</i>
<i>Fluctuating emotions.</i>		<i>Fixed emotions, “feeling stuck.”</i>
<i>Relatively stable self-worth.</i>		<i>Loss of self-worth, a sense of worthlessness.</i>
<i>Some specific regret.</i>		<i>An overall sense of guilt.</i>

GRIEF REACTIONS

Robert Baugher, Ph.D breaks down Guilt into categories that we were privileged to learn and discuss in our Hospice Volunteer Core training.

Shame – The American Heritage Dictionary defines shame as painful emotions caused by a strong sense of guilt, unworthiness, or disgrace. Many who suffer from self-induced shame feel responsible in some way for the death, or didn’t do enough to prevent it.

Regret – To feel sorry, or disappointed about an outcome. This is the “*shoulda, woulda, coulda’s*” that can emotionally attack you. “*If only I...*”, “*Why didn’t I...*”, “*I should have....*” In listening to regrets that the bereaved have brought up to me, where I hear “*I should have...*” and they were actually right, and they really should have, I can count on two fingers. Almost everybody I talk with that raised this concern did the best they could do with the knowledge and experience they had. Please, don’t *should* on yourself.

Anger – This is an inner-hostility, or a rage. Having something you value taken from you can make you angry. Dr. Baugher explains that anger allowed to reside in grief can have a cyclical effect leading to episodes of anger based on real or perceived occurrences over and over. When the bereaved is angry at himself he can become self-loathing and his sense of guilt can increase and perpetuate. Placed on others it becomes blame and responsibility lies with someone or something outside ourselves.

Guilt – A natural response that needs expression. Guilt is a state of being that affects us on the physical, emotional, and spiritual levels. Guilt, blame and hostility are feelings that help us to make sense out of bizarre, chaotic situations – a way to justify the unexplainable.

To understand the differences between guilt types and shame will help in getting others to process their way through the negative effects.

GRIEF AND GUILT VS. SHAME

In short, “**Guilt**” is a person feeling like, “I have committed an offense.” “**Shame**” is the family or the culture saying “You are the offense.”

Guilt is Self-Assigned (for the self-governed individual). **Shame** is Familial or Cultural-Assigned (for the family or culturally governed individual). **Shame** can be an intensely agonizing feeling of being flawed as a human being.

Guilt Category: Healthy (Convicting) Guilt – An emotional feeling of discomfort over something we have clearly done wrong, or violating a standard. This Self-Convicting discomfort allows us to face what we did wrong, seek forgiveness/self-forgiveness leading to healing and correcting future behaviors or actions.

Guilt Category: Unhealthy (Undeserved) Guilt – In bereavement this includes “Hindsight” guilt, or the perception of wrong doing.

GRIEF AND ANGER

Anger is a normal and natural response to losing someone or something that you valued. Anger must be *processed* by talking about it with a trusted listener or professional.

Anger can blend with guilt and become a destructive force for that person and those around him/her. Expressing anger is acceptable. It is unacceptable to express anger by breaking people or things. See also, writings on *FORGIVENESS*.

The devil’s work is to accuse and divide... and to sow discord among them. When we harbor anger in our heart, we do the devil’s work for him. – David Guzik

GRIEF AND GUILT

Types of Guilt excerpted from writing by Robert Baugher, Ph.D

Death Causation Guilt: This can occur whether the person was actually directly responsible for the death, or not at all responsible.

Illness-Related Guilt: In this type of guilt the focus is on the time period prior to and including the illness of a person who later died. "Why didn't I see she was sick?"; "Why didn't I insist the doctor take the alternate course of action?"; "Why didn't I insist on more testing?"; "Why did I put her in the care facility? She wanted to stay in her home."; "Why did I hope she would die?"

Role Guilt: This can come in the form of perceived failed promises to your loved one, or doing something the deceased would not approve of, even paying one bill over another, failing to honor their wishes or their memory, or failing to have special experiences like taking a special trip.

If-Only Guilt: This type of guilt stems from the belief that the bereaved could have done something to change the course of the illness and/or death.

Moral Guilt – This says that our past actions, sins, or moral/character failures contributed in some way to the death of the loved one. [Sin: To miss the mark.]

Survivor Guilt: This is experienced by military and law enforcement personnel, and even by bereaved that feel guilty simply because they outlived their loved one.

Grief Guilt: This is guilt where the bereaved regrets not doing something "more." "I should be grieving more," "I should be thinking about him more," "I should talk about her more," "I should visit the grave site more."

Unmentionable Guilt: Sometimes the guilt that a person feels is difficult to discuss because it involves a secret that feels too terrible to tell. It may involve knowledge of things that the person who died was involved in; or it may be something the bereaved survivor did. In either case it complicates the bereavement process by adding guilt on top of guilt.

[With Unmentionable Guilt, the traumatized/bereaved person may not want to say what happened as it is too private, painful, or even considered shameful (childhood trauma, or sexual assault). We honor their privacy, but encourage them to express the pain and the sadness that they experience without having to site the often horrific event.]

Getting Better Guilt: This guilt does not have grieving as the central focus. The new focus is on feeling better about life; laughter; going from brief to longer period of time in a day without thinking about the deceased; starting a new relationship.

More Guilt Terminology: *Motivating guilt, Personified guilt, Situational guilt, Neurotic guilt, Functional guilt.*

Guilt occurs when:

- Perfection is a goal. We always fall short/fail.
- We do/feel/say something that we think is "wrong".
- We don't do/feel/say/ something that we think we "should" have.
- We hurt someone else.
- We sin (whatever our definition of sin is).
- We are stuck and unable to make an important decision.
- We violate our conscience – our beliefs – or our moral system.

Feelings of Guilt:

Guilt is not necessarily rational but the feeling of guilt is very real and needs to be validated. Guilt may serve us in some way. If so, we feel a need to keep it around. Guilt is not necessarily a “negative” experience. Many creative, positive, honest, life-affirming acts are born out of guilt and the need to resolve guilt.

Feelings of guilt are often manifested in the body:

- We take on the symptoms of someone we love who is ill or who has died, e.g.; chest pains related to heart attack.
- We have stomachaches, headaches, loss of appetite, diarrhea, constipation, panic attacks, uncontrollable shaking, or backaches.
- We feel worthless, helpless, or hopeless. We 'cannot function normally.'
- Depression and panic often mask feelings of guilt.

Resolving Guilt:

- Acknowledge feelings and circumstances surrounding the issue.

Positive Effects of Guilt: *How to use Guilt positively*

- Perform an act of atonement. Create an action that will heal the feeling of guilt.
 - Talk with the person toward whom we feel guilty.
 - Ask forgiveness or perform some act of recompense.
 - Write a letter to the person toward whom we feel guilty.
 - Express feelings in a journal, or to a trusted person, if no recompense or forgiveness from another is possible.
 - Perform a ritual – rosary, Kaddish, plant a tree, do volunteer work, do a celebration of life.
- Forgive. It is important to be able to forgive ourselves, acknowledge our "humanness", accept that our "failures" and "shortcomings" are really ways for us to

grow into deeper understanding and acceptance – of ourselves and others. **Accept** the forgiveness of others, if and when it comes, and accept the healing balm of their love. **Release** others, if they cannot forgive you.

FORGIVENESS

Dr. Stephen Marmar of UCLA Medical School discusses forgiveness as follows:

Purpose: Acknowledging reality of pain, make possible grace, restoration, peace

Objective: Finding a way to forgive without giving up our principles.

Result: Help to heal wounds & remove residue of hurts, anger, resentment, retaliation.

Rudy Tomjanovich, NBA 4-time All-Star, concerning the person who injured him and terminated his NBA career: Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. It does far more damage to us and those who love us, than to those who have hurt us. Only those who walk the path of freedom will find out.

Three Categories of Forgiveness:

- 1 - Exoneration** - full restoration, such as following an accident, or an infraction by a child with limited understanding of the hurt they inflicted, or following a genuine apology where the person takes full responsibility without excuses, asks forgiveness, and repents (not knowingly repeat the action). Forgive and move on.
- 2 - Forbearance** - Inauthentic or incomplete apology, some element of blame in their apology or excuse. Consider whether you actually do bear some responsibility, but dismiss grudges, revengefulness, and looping the events. Forgive and keep a watchful eye; Trust and verify.
- 3 - Release** - (most challenging, after abuse, significant cheating, betrayal)
Remove the venom, do not waste time killing the snake. Redefine your life in terms other than the hurt done to you. Do not allow offender to live rent-free in your mind, reliving the original incident forever. Get help to be liberated from the tyranny of living in a hurtful past; to let go of the belief that the past could have been different.
=> does NOT require that there be any contact with the offender
=> does NOT imply condoning or excusing the hurt done, does not imply "It's okay."
=> does NOT protect one's safety if physically at risk of being harmed further

Forgiveness also does NOT:

- ~ **destroy our memory** of painful events and wrongs done
- ~ **remove all painful emotions** that may return with the memories
- ~ **remove all the consequences** of the wrongdoing
- ~ **restore trust**, but opens the door to the possibility that trust can someday be restored. Invite verification over time.

Forgiveness is a choice to respond to an wrong done in order to get a desired result of personal peace. If there were no pain, forgiveness would not be necessary.
Forgiveness of self is sometimes the primary issue.

Process of Forgiveness:

Dr. Gary Chapman introduces five elements of "apology languages". We each tend to be better at some than others, but all are important for a complete apology. However, not all are necessary for forgiveness to be extended.

Express regret

Accept responsibility

Make restitution

Genuinely repent

Request forgiveness (if this will not be harmful to self or others)

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Additional Considerations:

Is there any place for the concept of forgiveness? (Doesn't need an answer.)

Consider lessening the weight of the anger: *What does it feel like to set it down?*

-or- *How is it serving you to hang on to it?*

Anger may be less hurtful than sadness.

Sudden death or Betrayal surrounding a loss may involve more complicated hurts than losses involving natural death.