

SUGGESTIONS FOR HANDLING GUILT

If you feel guilty, it is helpful to admit it to yourself. It is important to be truthful about why you feel guilty.

Ask yourself what things specifically are bothering you the most. Talk over your feelings of guilt with a trusted friend or professional who will listen, care and not judge. Guilt should not be glossed over nor pushed down. TALK about your guilt until YOU can let it go.

Remember that you are human. No one is perfect. There is so much that we tried to do. There are things we did not do. Accepting our imperfections aids us in working out our guilt. Realize that living is a balance of good and bad. Try not to blame yourself for things that you did not know you were mishandling.

Remember there is not always an answer to "why" and you do not have to find somebody (yourself) or something to blame. Ask yourself if you want to live with guilt for the rest of your life. Realize that sometimes you are powerless and that you can't control everything that happens.

Forgive yourself; ask for the forgiveness of your loved one and of God. If your faith is shaken, try to put your religious beliefs back together and find comfort in your religion.

If appropriate, use the "empty chair" dialogue. This technique offers you the opportunity to focus on your guilt, to admit, to understand it and deal with it.

If guilt is hindering your recovery, seek professional counseling. Don't be afraid or embarrassed to talk about your feelings of guilt with those who have been trained to help.

You can learn from your guilt for the other people in your life. If appropriate, adopt a new lifestyle for the future. From past mistakes you may be able to change for the better.

Consider that your loved one would not want you to continue to suffer from guilt and grief. Try to concentrate on the special times that you had with your loved one.

Try writing about your thoughts and feelings of guilt.

Become determined to live life to the best of your ability. When you are able, find some purpose or meaning in your life by helping others. Volunteer – in helping others you help yourself.

Some things are beyond our handling, coping or correcting. Perfect parenting/partnership/friendship is a role beyond realistic capability. It is helpful to realize you did the best you were able to do under the circumstances. You had no training and by trial and error you did the best you could. A person's best may vary from day to day depending on life's other pressures and involvements.

Remember, many bereaved people initially feel guilty but their guilt does lessen with effort on their part and with the perspective of time.