

Fact Sheet:

BATTLING GUILT AND REGRET

Guilt

Guilt is an emotion that happens automatically within the body. It comes from feeling responsibility or shame and can occur even when uncontrollable circumstances exist. Sorting true guilt – for which there is some deserved blame and which we use to make positive changes – from false guilt – which is often chronic and damaging to our lives (sometimes called toxic guilt) – is vital to healing after traumatic loss, such as loss to suicide.

https://blogs.psychcentral.com/psychology-self/2018/11/guilt-responsibility-dysfunction/?li_source=LI&li_medium=popular17

Regret

Regret is a feeling of sorrow that something happened or that one did or said something (or did not do or say something) he wishes he had done differently, even when these thoughts come in the form of an uncontrollable emotional earthquake. Distress, confusion, and pain are difficult to think through. And, of course, it is natural to regret that the loss happened at all. Additionally, life is now changed, futures are uncertain and certainly not what had been expected. Recovery is so complex. But healing does happen, new life does emerge, and a duality does grow within us. One finds ways to live with this loss, to have both moments of regret and happiness.

<https://allianceofhope.org/emotions-challenges>

Actionable Steps:

BATTLING GUILT AND REGRET

Stop

Coping techniques and strategies make a huge difference in the aftermath of suicide. Haunting thoughts, extreme emotions and nervous systems that are not working properly due to the effects of stress on the body need care. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other conditions need professional treatment, but there are things a person can do to aid in his or her own healing. Self-care includes purposely diverting thoughts that threaten to overwhelm you. Hold up your hand and say, "Stop!" Consciously move to some other activity, or replace traumatic memories with memories of your loved one in happier times. Distract your mind. Move your body. And believe that this will become easier.

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/end-of-life/in-depth/suicide/art-20044900>

GUILT CHECK

1. Look up definitions for "guilt" and "regret."

What is the difference between these two terms? Use a journal, notebook, or index cards to answer the following questions.

- Why do I feel I have done something wrong?
- How did my words or actions hurt someone I love?
- Was what happened my fault?

2. Now, check each of your answers with the following questions.

- Does my answer indicate true guilt or false guilt?
- Were there other factors?
- How much control did I really have?
- What complicated the situation?

REGRET JOURNAL PROMPTS

1. Finish the sentences below.

I will always love (insert name of loved one) because _____.

I wish I could have _____.

I wish my loved one could have _____.

I regret these things: _____.

2. Write your own definitions of "guilt" and "regret."