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Grief to Relief:

Give up the Guilt: *Caring for Your Clients & Yourself*

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Guilt: the gift that keeps on giving.

-Erma Bombeck



Caregiver Guilt

"I had one load of dirty clothes in the washing machine, [another] in the dryer. The timer was set to notify me when the pot of potatoes I'd set to boil would be done enough to mash for Rodger's lunch."

No matter where I was or what I was doing **part of my mind and most of my heart was with him.**

I went to sleep puzzling over how to add flavor to his diet of pureed food and thickened liquids....woke up wondering what his blood pressure would be....stopped mid step, listening to the air, hoping for a cough or sneeze to signal he was still breathing.

Caring for him reminded me of caring for my babies when they seemed too fragile and I **feared that any misstep on my part would bring disaster.**

He had a heart attack. He almost died. Again. And I felt so guilty about that. Shouldn't I have seen the signs before it got that far?

-<https://thecaregiverspace.org/coping-caregiver-guilt-crushes/>

Caregiver Guilt

- Not doing enough –
 - should be with care receiver more
 - should be with “your own family” more
 - should be at work more
 - should do more no matter for whom you are doing it
 - should do more even if you are doing it non-stop
- Tired from work so not “there” even when with family
- Not able to keep all the balls in the air perfectly
- Not making MIRACLES

Grief & Guilt...Let's Start with Grief

What is Grief

- **Natural and Normal – The emotional response**
- **Most Universal and Profound of All Human Experience**
 - cannot be avoided
 - regardless of education, wealth, good deeds, etc
- **Emotional Response to Loss**
 - not intellectual or spiritual
 - intellectual and/or spiritual at odds with Emotional
 - Anne changing the light bulb
 - intellectual truth is “not the person’s fault”
 - emotional truth is caregiving is hard
 - house destroyed in tornado also not your fault but no less hard
 - stop denying the emotional truth



Definitions of Grief

- Reaching for someone or something that has always been there only to find that when we need them one more time they **are not there** (*this could be the life/parent/partner/child we had*)
 - or someone who's never been there.....and is still not there...or flip-flopper
- **Conflicting feelings** about the end of or change in a familiar pattern or behavior.
 - sad, mad, relief, frustration, hopefulness, hopelessness, optimism, fear
 - Ted's cancer – Anne doing battle with self
 - changes from moving, losing capability and functionality, not driving
- **You AND care receiver are BOTH grieving these changes**
 - *Everyone – you and care receiver – has conflicting feelings*
 - Caregiving HUGE task in the midst of very difficult emotional time

Common Grief Responses

*EVERYONE IS COMPROMISED –
you AND your care receiver*

- Disrupted Sleep & Eating
 - sleeping too much or not enough or both and at the wrong times
 - eating too much or not enough or both
- **Reduced Concentration and Focus**
 - Anne double booking events / men's bathrooms
 - likely to forget appts, to pay bills
 - **DANGEROUS** – accidents more likely
 - slow down, avoid multi-tasking
- Roller coaster of Emotional Energy
 - satisfaction, love, frustration, fear, **feeling stuck**



Ethics of Grief: Myths of Grief

- Don't feel bad
- Give it time
- Stay busy
- Be strong
- Grieve alone
- Replace the loss



Grief is an Emotionally Flat Tire



- Myths don't fix the tire
- Changing the tire requires ACTION

Why Caregivers Struggle & Feel Guilty

- Caregiving is hard and fraught with grief because of constant change...
 - **relentless – even when “off” duty still feels like on duty**
 - **constantly changing waiting for the other shoe to drop**
 - = GRIEF = uses gobs of emotional and physical energy
 - have less energy when required to do more and harder tasks
 - **emotional truth different than intellectual**
 - reality is HARD on you even if it isn't other person's "fault"
 - **often out of area of expertise, ie health issues**
 - TPN (needles, saline, procedure) was hard and scary with Chuck
 - **care receiver's needs seem more important than yours**
 - in any given moment they probably are
 - but over time lack of self-care adds up
 - 23% caregiving for 5 years+ report health is fair or poor
 - extreme stress can take as much as 10 years off caregiver's life
 - 40-70% of caregivers have significant symptoms of depression

What Grief Can Teach Guilt

- **REMEMBER:** Everyone in “the system” has conflicting feelings
 - William Work or No Work (*small but easy to remember example*)
 - Including YOU
 - Nobody is immune to conflicting feelings
 - Everyone’s conflicting feelings conflict with everyone else’s
 - This makes an already difficult situation even harder.
 - I want “A”...mom wants “B”...sister wants “C”
 - I do too much. Sister doesn’t do enough. Sister disagrees
- **REMEMBER:** No perfect solution. Either way feel bad.
 - Therefore, constant **CONFLICTING FEELINGS.**
 - Conflicting feelings are not an indictment
 - They are not an indicator of a wrong choice
 - *They are an indicator of a difficult situation*

Give Up the Guilt

- **DID I INTEND TO CAUSE HARM??**

- *ask yourself this REPEATEDLY*
- if no, then not guilty (*if yes, then apologize and correct (sometimes true!)*)
- causing harm is not the same as *intending* to cause harm

- **Acknowledge EMOTIONAL TRUTH – not just the intellectual**

- use “At this Moment” skill set
- neither denies nor indulges emotions
- does not extend emotions into future

- **Of course, will wish things could be different, better or more**

- this is normal, natural, unavoidable
- this is not the same as being guilty
- we must *articulate these feelings accurately*
 - *STOP saying “I feel so guilty” and say “I am so sad, mad, scared”*

Give Up the Guilt

- We must take at least **1%** responsibility for our current reaction
 - true that the situation may not be of our making
 - also true that the situation is not of our choosing/wanting
 - unfortunately, we cannot change the situation
 - **the only thing we can change is our reaction to it**
- Do we make it harder on ourselves?
- Do we make it harder on our families?
- Do we beat ourselves up with guilt?
- **YOUR CHOICE!!! GIVE UP THE GUILT!!**



The Place

Grief to Relief is offered in individual or group formats at the Grief to Relief office in Peachtree Corners, GA. Additionally, groups can take place at a central location such as a church or community center as an organization desires.

The Format

Grief to Relief utilizes The Grief Recovery Method which is the most authentic and effective program for moving beyond loss. It is experiential and action based. Clients are relieved to learn what to DO to feel better in just a few short weeks. The Grief Recovery Institute who for over 30 years has helped hundreds of thousands of people worldwide to move beyond their loss.

The People

Anne Keeton is the director of Grief to Relief^{fSM}. Her clients call her the Dalai Lama of Grief. She calls herself a sherpa. She cannot walk the road for you but she knows the route. *Please call anytime.*

