



## Active Mind & Body Newsletter - Issue No.6 July 2007

### “Feeling Your Way Into Health and Happiness” ... now let's talk GUILT!

In my last newsletter we discussed how shame can have a healthy and useful purpose and can be used positively in our lives when we employ the universal principles of emotional intelligence.

In this edition I would like to focus on GUILT.

Have you ever felt ...

1. like you did the wrong thing
2. like you let someone down
3. like you broke a cultural or moral norm
4. like you didn't do enough for someone

These are examples of Guilt.

What is guilt and what is healthy guilt?

Guilt and shame are responsible for helping us manage boundaries and relationships.

“So does guilt have a purpose in our lives?” I hear you ask! Actually, the answer is yes! Within the context of boundaries and relationships, the purpose of guilt is to let us know we have done something wrong. Guilt occurs when we have (or believe we have) done the wrong thing, and this response is often influenced by our own moral standards.

Therefore, the emotional logic of guilt is to help us realise we have done something wrong and repair the rift that has been created between ourselves and others as a result of something we have done.

Ideally, when we have done the wrong thing, we respond by feeling guilt and act on that by talking to the other person involved, offering an apology or asking how we can make the situation right!

When guilt goes wrong

While this sounds simple in theory, it can be difficult for people to (a) admit they have done something wrong, and (b) to confront the situation and the person so the situation can be repaired. Another way guilt can interfere with our relationships is when we have quite rigid, unhelpful beliefs about how we should behave, e.g. When we are holding onto unrealistic beliefs we cannot possibly live up to.

Therefore, when confronted with one of these situations, we experience the feeling of guilt, which takes us away from the actual situation and can have a negative impact on our emotional state and ability to connect with the other person. These beliefs often come from our past, and they don't serve us well in adult life.



For example, do you recognize any of these:

- “I must help people if they ask for something, if I don’t I’m doing something wrong”
- “I must be nice to everyone”
- “I cannot say no”
- “I am responsible for other peoples feelings”
- “It is wrong to say something negative about your parents”

The key to transforming guilt is, firstly, to work out which of the two guilt problems we are having.

1. Not confronting situations and people that we have wronged and putting things right to repair the situation?
2. Having a personal “guilt radar” that is too sensitive, resulting in us feeling a lot of guilt that has no real validity in the current situation?

While the first example above is often the most easily ignored and can take great courage to confront, the second example is the most common issue that people present with in counseling.

It’s important to note that many situations may be helped when we can make our mistakes public, make amends, and when the other person receives an apology.

A few helpful steps...

When we feel guilt due to unhelpful beliefs from the past, working through the following steps can put us on the road to repair:

1. The process will start with you feeling GUILTY about something
2. Notice the guilt; don’t run from it
3. Put it into words: “I am feeling guilty about ...”
4. Ask yourself, “Have I done anything wrong?”
5. If your answer is yes, put yourself on the line and deal with the situation
6. If you have not done anything wrong, it is likely that an unhelpful belief is blame. Confront the belief behind the feeling, and work on changing that belief instead of changing your guilt.

Have fun with your guilt!



Please feel free to forward this newsletter to anyone who may be interested, email or call me with any questions you may have or better yet send me stories about how you have used these ideas to make positive changes to your life.

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Coming Soon  
In the next newsletter we will be looking at sadness.

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