



# Wellbeing

## Guilt

### Guilt; A different perspective

Guilt is a big word – obviously not in length but in weight for sure. And when we say we ‘feel guilty’ there is a whole lot going on in terms of how we understand the word and also how that ‘guilt’ makes us feel about ourselves.

There probably isn’t a single one of us who hasn’t used the word ‘guilt’ to describe how we have felt at some point over the last couple of months during this time of the Coronavirus pandemic. It may be that we have felt ‘guilty’ about what we haven’t done with our kids in terms of home schooling. We may have felt ‘guilty’ about the day when the only thing we were capable of was lying on the sofa and wondering what on earth was happening in our world. It may be that even now we feel ‘guilty’ about how we have worked harder than ever during this time and as a result know that our relationships and partnerships have suffered. Or maybe the feeling of guilt comes because we feel we ‘should’ be doing more to support our community.

‘Guilt’, understood in this way, comes in a range of different disguises but the way it impacts us is pretty consistent.

Firstly, it makes us feel like we are somewhat inadequate, particularly in comparison to everyone else who we are convinced are all living their ‘best lockdown life’, full of baking, amazing family times, hilarity and absolutely no struggle! This is all compounded by how much time we spend looking at other people’s Instagram accounts where their curated ‘perfect’ lives beat us into submission and feelings of shame.

Secondly, what guilt does is stops us in our tracks. It paralyses us and holds us back. We end up with this thought running around in our heads that suggests that the fact we’ve not been able to do one thing is good reason to not do anything - so we stop. This is really unhelpful and results in us ending up feeling even more guilty!

But what if we can understand guilt in a different way? We need to recognise the clear difference between shame and guilt. Shame is what takes us down and makes us believe we are less than others. It makes us want to hide how we are feeling and the story we are living. Shame isn’t a gift. Shame must not have any place in our lives – of that we can be sure.

What if ‘guilt’ on the other hand is a gentle nudge, a reminder, a way of helping us to see what we might be able to consider doing differently next time. It doesn’t take us down or make us feel less. During this pandemic, and at any time really, the best thing we can do for our wellbeing is to get a right and honest perspective. Yes – there are things that recently we may not have done as well as we might normally do them. Yes – we may have found ourselves unable to do anything but lie on a sofa and work out what on earth is going on. Yes – we may have not spoken with the kindness we should have done to our partners or friends. Yes – we may not have got as much done with our kids as we hoped.

But guilt nudges us, it gives us a bit of light to be able to see that today is a different day to yesterday. What didn’t work yesterday, we can have another go at today. Today we can apologise if we need to. That’s all okay. It’s part of the way we make relationships work. We can take little steps to do things that will restore life to us. We can shift our perspective. We can try again.

What a gift that is. And we definitely don’t need to compare ourselves to the curated lives of others that we see on social media.

If you’re interested in reading more about the distinctions between guilt and shame, and how we can manage these feelings, we recommend Brené Brown’s book – *Daring Greatly*, 2013, published by Penguin.