



Guilt as a Form of Feedback

Like a baton in a relay race, guilt is handed on from person to person. Each generation receives it and passes it on to the next. Parents, teachers, spouses, businesses, governments, and religions have used it—consciously or not—for behavior modification or punishment. It is such a part of the fabric of our culture that we don't question its validity.

The Ball and Chain of Guilt

"Guilt is the source of sorrow, the avenging fiend...with whips and stings," wrote the 17th century dramatist, Nicholas Rowe. Rowe's words are hardly over-dramatized. Guilt is like a ball and chain that weighs us down and keeps us from being who we are.

Guilt is a secondary emotion. That means it's a feeling that stems from other thoughts or feelings. Guilt comes from thinking that you have done, or want to do, something wrong. These thoughts of guilt infect and suppress your real feelings, such as anger, grief, desire, or happiness.

Typically, we deal with feelings of guilt by denying them. However, denied feelings don't disappear; they submerge and stay unconscious, continuing to show up in negative patterns of behavior.

But the good news is that guilt is simply a conditioned response—which means we can change it.

Using Guilt to Grow

First, remember that we are here to learn. Our culture has taught us that making mistakes is bad, but mistakes are simply a way of learning and growing, and provide excellent feedback.

Acknowledge the guilt. Become aware of the guilty feelings that overlay your true feelings. Listen to the "you should"

and "you shouldn't" messages that guilt whispers in your ear.

Question your guilt. Don't take it for granted. You were taught to feel guilty for feeling or behaving in a certain way. Are you willing to unlearn this behavior, and to release it? Examine what guilt is costing you and if it offers any positive results in your life.

Recognize the difference between your conscience and guilt. Our conscience provides us with a self-assured sense of right and wrong and is a helpful guide to behavior, while guilt is a form of brainwashing that erodes self-worth and our ability to make good judgments. Those "should" messages are a good indicator of the difference.

Experience the feeling that guilt is suppressing. Healing occurs when feelings are acknowledged and experienced. Jackie had been taught as a child that anger was an unacceptable emotion. Feeling angry with her husband, she became aware of the guilt—"I shouldn't be angry"—that was stopping her from speaking up. With that realization, Jackie's guilt evaporated. She expressed herself and, for the first time in her life, knew what guilt-free anger felt like: alive, clean, and clear.

Move the guilt out of your body. Identify where in your body you feel guilt; imagine all your guilt gathered there. See it now as if in a balloon, floating out of your body, into space. Or, write down all the reasons you "should" feel guilty—all those things you did or failed to do. Then burn the list.

Living your life forever feeling bad about yourself benefits nobody, least of all you. And the world is robbed of the fullness of who you are. *

10 Ways to Avoid Self-Growth

Personal growth can be scary. So it's natural to find yourself avoiding it. Here are 10 ways that can happen and how to embrace the changes of self-growth instead.

- 1. Denial.** It's difficult to grow when you don't see the need. Listen to the quiet voice inside and to what your loved ones are saying. Get the support you need to see the truth.
- 2. Seeing yourself as a victim.** If you're always one-down, you can't become the empowered person you are meant to be.
- 3. Substance abuse.** Whether you're self-medicating or seeking escape, the problems just don't go away without the willingness to face them.
- 4. Self-loathing.** Nothing banishes self-hatred faster than self-care. Choose in any moment the kindest path.
- 5. Blame.** Pointing the finger means we never see our own role.
- 6. Defensiveness.** This is a racket we swing against anything that suggests we might be at fault. Try to see "faults" as opportunities to grow.
- 7. Fear.** Acknowledge the frightened parts of yourself, praise your courage, and be gentle.
- 8. Rage.** Rage is a call for attention to our triggers, but sometimes we get stuck there. Accepting and working creatively with the feelings can help free you.
- 9. Busyness.** Constantly moving allows no time for the reflection that lays the foundation for self-growth.
- 10. Unwillingness to admit error.** As with defensiveness, if we stop judging "error" as wrong, an ever-expanding life awaits. *

A Letter From Fred Chapin



One of the more insidious cultural forces that seem to exert control over how we behave and feel is guilt. It disguises our real feelings and blocks our true natures. The cover article explains what guilt is and how it operates, then offers several approaches for freeing yourself from its toxic grip.

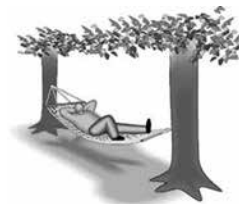
Few situations are more devastating to a relationship than an affair. The betrayal and loss of trust often strike a fatal blow to the marriage or partnership. But what if you feel that the relationship still has hope and you want to repair it? The article on page 3 explores this issue: how to determine if the relationship is worth saving and how to begin the healing process.

Also in this issue are 10 barriers to self-growth, as well as the quiz, which asks how well you are taking care of yourself (an important thing to do any time you're facing lots of change).

Rounding out this issue is an article about the self-limiting beliefs that many people hold about money. We can't fix economic problems like inflation, but we can improve our relationship with the medium of exchange we use.

Enjoy this issue of the newsletter. If you have questions about any of the articles or would like more copies, please don't hesitate to call.

How's Your Self-Care?



Taking care of ourselves is often the last thing on our minds, though we all generally know that it's more important than ever. We have to meet that deadline, use break time to run errands, accomplish all the items on our list. We all know the negative impact on our health that stress can have—so, let's find some balance. Take this self-quiz to see how well you are caring for yourself.

True False

- 1. When I'm upset and/or feeling hopeless, I talk about the situation with a friend, family member or therapist. And if I need help, I ask for it.
- 2. I let go of the way things used to be. I accept the way things are.
- 3. Every day I do something physical even if it's just a walk around the block or a 15-minute workout.
- 4. I eat healthfully and take the time to enjoy my meals. I set aside work, driving and other activities while I eat.
- 5. I think positively. I view problems as opportunities and obstacles as challenges.
- 6. I can say no when I need or want to.
- 7. I remember to breathe.
- 8. If I'm experiencing physical symptoms, I go to the appropriate health care professional. I don't panic about the symptoms, and I don't deny them either.
- 9. I can settle for "good enough." I don't demand perfection in everything that I do.
- 10. I recognize the value of working in different gears. Some tasks require less effort. That saves energy for those times when I need to push myself.
- 11. I get enough sleep most nights.
- 12. I value my personal relationships and give them the time and energy they need and deserve.
- 13. I choose healthy ways to relieve stress. I don't rely on crutches such as smoking, drinking and overeating.
- 14. I recognize the importance of breaks during the day, as well as vacations.
- 15. I listen to and respect my feelings.

*If you answered false to several of these, you may want to take an honest look at the impact your choices may be having. Please do not hesitate to call if you would like support in taking better care of yourself. **

Can This Relationship Be Saved?

Angie and Darrell have been married for 14 years and have three children. One day, after taking their son to school, Angie spotted Darrell in a coffee shop holding hands with another woman and whispering intimately. She felt as though the ground was slipping away beneath her. How could this be happening? How would they ever recover?

Exact numbers are hard to come by, but some studies reveal that about half of married people in the U.S. will engage in infidelity at some point during their marriage. What do you do when it happens in your relationship? How do you know if your relationship is worth saving? And how can you repair such a catastrophic betrayal?

When the Secrecy Ends

When infidelity invades a relationship, it often permeates the atmosphere long before the affair is discovered. While one partner may cope with suspicion, low self-esteem and resentment, the other partner may wrestle with guilt and the fear of being caught.

When the affair is actually confirmed and brought into the open, it is a traumatic event for both people. For the person who discovers the affair, there is the agony of betrayal. For the one having the affair, there may be a sickening mixture of remorse and relief—at least now the secrecy can end.

The Necessary First Step

Before any talk of next steps for the relationship, marriage or family, some fundamental healing must take place. The person who discovered the affair must be allowed to vent his or her feelings in a safe way and with plenty of support.

The one who is having the affair needs to first and foremost end the affair—no healing can happen until that step is complete. He or she also must give the other partner the time and space needed to find enough balance to continue to the next stage.

Each person would benefit from individual therapy. However, couples therapy is crucial in this process for healing to take place.

Relationship Assessment

The discovery of an affair highlights underlying issues that had been threatening the relationship. With these issues having been brought to light, the couple can decide if the relationship is worth repairing.

In therapy, Darrell faced his feelings of resentment about Angie's long work hours, and Angie received

support coping with feelings of betrayal that harkened back to her father's affair when she was a teenager.

Like others who have discovered an affair, Angie got plenty of advice to leave the marriage. It was an emotional, confusing time that shook the foundation of her whole life.

Ultimately, the decision to leave the relationship or marriage is yours alone, but here are four important questions that can guide you if you have discovered an affair:

1. Has your partner or spouse taken responsibility and expressed remorse?
2. Has your partner or spouse ended the affair?
3. Is he or she willing to attend couples therapy?
4. Do you share the same values and goals for the future? Is this someone you are excited about spending the rest of your life with? (These last questions are just as crucial for the person who had the affair.)

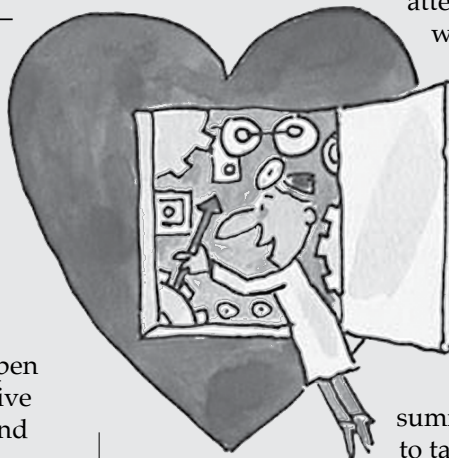
Repairing the Relationship

Ultimately, Angie and Darrell decided to stay together, partly because of their three children. And their healing had to include the whole family. Each child attended individual therapy as well as group sessions with everyone.

This process can be exhausting but illuminating, and families who go through this type of trauma often come out with stronger bonds and a deeper understanding of each other.

Here, finally, is a summary of the healing steps to take after the discovery of an affair:

- 1. Get support.** Make sure each partner has adequate support to individually express their feelings.
- 2. Get to the bottom.** Work separately and together to look at the root causes of the affair and the health of the relationship.
- 3. Get together.** Use the therapy process to communicate honestly and respectfully about whether you will stay together or move on.
- 4. Get better.** Involve each person in strengthening the family bond. *



Uncovering Your Limiting Beliefs About Money

In the face of money issues, such as chronic debt, it can be tempting to throw up our hands in powerlessness or blame others for the problems we face.

Yet, if we're willing to look at our own beliefs about money, we may find that they're getting in the way of a sense of well-being and security in our lives. Here are a few common attitudes about money:

I Don't Have Enough Money

Although Sarah's income is twice that of her friends, she talks to them often about how hard it is to pay the bills. At the root of her fear may be a belief that she can't take care of herself or that the world is a harsh place with scarce resources. People like Sarah sometimes fear that they will lose everything and end up homeless.

I'll Never Have Enough

Mike also feels that he doesn't have enough money, but rather than feeling that the world is a harsh place

for everyone, he believes it is especially hard for him. Other people will do just fine, but he'll always be poor. If you try to encourage him, he'll list the many strikes against him. People like Mike are often under earners, blind to the opportunities that are available.

I Don't Like/Care About Money

This attitude is held by people at all income levels. It can have its origin in religious beliefs, political beliefs or guilt at inherited privilege. Pam is a child of the 60's who says she doesn't really like money. She never allows herself to have what she truly wants and always buys the cheapest version. She's a landscape designer, but regularly underbills her clients. A classic under earner, she sometimes relies on credit cards for basic expenses such as rent.

I'm Clueless about Money

Doug doesn't know how much mon-

ey he has or spends and, as a result, frequently finds himself saddled with late fees and bounced check charges. People like Doug may believe that they're not skilled enough to handle their money or may think that money is uncouth. Doug makes a good



income, but his unwillingness to pay attention to it also makes him vulnerable to theft, fraud, debt he can't afford and bankruptcy.

If any of these attitudes resonate, you may

want to explore them with compassion for yourself and support. As you bring awareness to self-limiting beliefs and adopt a more empowering stance, you expand into a larger sense of personal freedom. ✧

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