

What to Do When You Guilt Yourself

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Sarah here. We hope that you found last week's blog on dealing with parent guilt helpful. While Lisa focused more on recognizing when your kids are triggering parent guilt and learning how to manage that guilt, today, I'm focusing on what to do when *you* are the one triggering that guilt.

Like Lisa mentioned last week, guilt isn't bad- it's just an emotion. It can in fact help us slow down and evaluate whether we need to change course. If you were stressed after a long day at work and you snapped at your kids just because they were chatting a little too loudly at dinner, the discomfort of guilt may help you stop and evaluate what's actually wrong and lead you to apologize for taking your fatigue and work frustration out on them.

But sometimes guilt isn't helpful, and it gets in the way. What about when you feel the pangs of guilt when you're going out to lunch with friends? Does guilt rear its head when you decline your child's request to do something together because you're having some alone time? There are plenty of times that parents feel guilty for doing things they want and need to do. It's easy to cave in when that guilt arises and avoid practicing self-care.

When parents guilt themselves about spending time away from their kids and about engaging in self-care activities, they may be less present and get less out of the activities. I mean, how much fun is lunch with friends if you spend the whole time ruminating about whether you spending 2 hours away from home is going to ruin your child's life? I am only slightly exaggerating to make a point...as a mom, I know how quickly parent guilt can lead to catastrophizing.

Before you cancel those plans or attempt to spend every waking moment focused on your family, consider this: you deserve the same love and care that your kids do. And your kids deserve to have parents who live rich and full lives. Self-care isn't selfish. It's vital. And, if you won't do it for yourself- do it for your kids. When you invest in yourself, you have more energy

and resources to share with your family. And you provide your kids of a great model for how adults (and parents) can balance taking care of themselves and taking care of others.



So, when you start to guilt yourself (and I'm saying when not if because I know that realistically, it's going to happen), take a moment, notice that feeling, and evaluate whether it's helpful or not. If it's not helpful, make an active choice to be present. See if you can redirect your attention on where you are, what you're doing, and why you're doing it. This is a great opportunity to practice mindfulness and be intentional with your actions. And remember that the feeling of guilt—no matter how distressing it is in the moment—is temporary, like all feelings. It will pass if you let it.