

# Guilt

Guilt following a loss can be due to any of the following:

- Over having done or having said something that is now regretted.
- Over *not* having done or having said something that is now regretted.
  - Over surviving when your loved one died.
  - Over not grieving enough. Over grieving “too much”.
  - Over feeling that you failed to live up to certain standards.
- Over having other emotional reactions to the loss such as anger, jealousy or relief that the death has occurred.

Examples of guilt statements:

*“If only...” “Why didn’t I...” “I should have...” “I should not have...”*  
*“I don’t deserve to...” “This was payment for...”*

## Suggestions on how to cope:

Remember, whatever you were doing when the death occurred, you were doing what you felt was the right thing to do at the time. Now, looking back, it is easy to say, “I should have done it another way.” Watch yourself when you use the word “**should**.” It indicates that you have a “rule” that you are attempting to force on yourself. In addition, remember:

You can **never** “should have.”  
You can only do something now, or plan for the future.  
Let go of this rule.

It is OK to feel guilty for a while, but ask yourself these five important guilt questions:

- How long am I going to choose to feel this way?
- When am I going to say, “I have suffered enough?”
- What would it take to lessen my guilt?
- What would it take to forgive myself?
- Would my loved one want me to be feeling like this?

Many people have found it helpful to write a letter saying things that have been left unsaid, such as “I am sorry...” or “I love you.”

Another helpful way to deal with guilt is to take the energy that you have been investing into the guilt and channel it into a project. It could be volunteer work or creating something new.

*Sources: A Guide for the Bereaved Survivor by Robert Baugher, Ph.D. & Marc Calija and WhatsYourGrief.com*