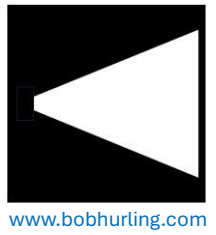


Guilty Feelings?



Overview

Guilt often gets in the way of wellbeing. It stops people from putting themselves first, blocks self-care, and leaves a lingering sense of “I should have...” or “I shouldn’t have...” even when nothing useful comes from it. What if instead of arguing with guilt, you gave it a little compassion, or just accepted that you’re human?

A new study explored this idea by giving people one of two short daily exercises, either to boost self-compassion or to practise unconditional self-acceptance, and then seeing what changed after a week. Both approaches helped, but one stood out for easing guilt’s grip.

Key Findings & Insights

Self-Kindness Works

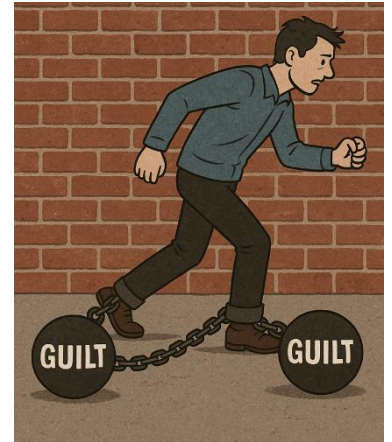
Both groups – those doing self-compassion and those practising self-acceptance, showed reduced **shame-proneness** after just seven days. These weren’t therapy sessions or long retreats, just short exercises completed at home each day. That’s encouraging: small steps in mindset really can reduce the weight of self-judgement.

But Guilt Shifted Most with Compassion

Only the self-compassion group saw a significant reduction in **guilt-proneness**. Guilt often lingers because we feel we *should* feel bad, and oddly, accepting ourselves doesn’t always stop that. But showing ourselves the same warmth and perspective we might offer a friend does.

“What would I say to a friend who felt like this?”

That’s one of the prompts from the self-compassion exercise. Turns out, it shifts more than just feelings. It softens harsh self-criticism, lifts the fog of moral overthinking, and helps people move on.



Why That Matters

High guilt-proneness is linked to anxiety, burnout, and avoidance. When people feel guilty, they’re less likely to protect their time, rest when needed, or pursue their goals. Reducing guilt isn’t about dodging responsibility (honest). It’s about letting go of over-responsibility. That, in turn, frees people up to act, not out of pressure, but choice.

Conclusion

If you’re often torn between what you want to do and what you *should* do...

If you feel bad taking time for yourself...

If your inner critic gets loud after even small mistakes...

...then a simple daily self-compassion practice could help. The benefits aren’t just emotional, they’re practical. Less guilt means more clarity, more action, and a better chance of living life on your terms.

Self-compassion and self-acceptance may take different paths, but both help unhook us from perfectionism. If guilt is holding you back, try talking to yourself like someone worth caring for. Because you are!

Crisan, S., Canache, M., Buksa, D., & Nechita, D. (2023). A comparison between self-compassion and unconditional self-acceptance: interventions on self-blame, empathy, shame-, guilt-proneness, and performance. *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*, 41(1), 64-80.