



**Helping Grievors Cope with Guilt, Anger, and Other Difficult Emotions**

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Presented by Boeing



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**Types of Guilt**



- Death Causation
  - Moral
  - Role
  - Survivor
  - Grief
  - Recovery
- (Miles & Demi, 1992)



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**Death Causation Guilt**



- Either by omission or commission, the mourner believes that he/she contributed to the loss
- Guilt does not have to be rational to be real



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### Moral Guilt

- The mourner believes that the loss is a punishment for some past act
- The case of the unfaithful father
- Often may have spiritual undertones




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### Role Guilt



- An individual perceives that he/she was not adequately fulfilling a role: "I was not a good enough mother (father, brother, sister, daughter, son)...."
- In military families, guilt and blame may focus on guiding someone into service

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### Survivor Guilt

- The mourner believes that he or she should have died rather than the person who did die: "It should have been me...."
- Not uncommon in sibling loss, especially where the sibling is idealized
- Older or ill persons may experience this when someone younger or in perceived better health dies first




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### Grief and Recovery Guilt



Grief guilt: When mourners feel they are grieving too long or inappropriately

Recovery guilt: When mourners feel they are doing too well



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### Guilt and Relief

- Feelings of relief are not uncommon in grief  
(McGonigle & Elison, *Liberating Losses*, 2003)
- Types of relief
  - Altruistic
  - Relationship
  - Dual
- Relief and guilt



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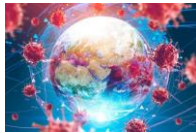
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### Guilt in COVID-19 Bereavement

- Death Causation:** *She got it from me*
  - Moral Guilt:** *This death or disease is a punishment for me*
  - Role Guilt:** *I should have taken greater care* (can be about contracting the illness, offering care etc.)
  - Survivor Guilt:** *Why did I live and he died?*
- Recovery guilt, grief guilt, and relief



**Guilt does not have to be rational to be real!**



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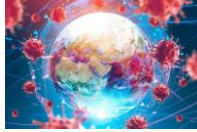
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### Guilt in COVID-19 Bereavement

- Unable to visit dying loved one
- No or minimal end-of-life conversations
- Mourning rituals disrupted
- Isolation and fewer opportunities to process and transform guilt




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### Guilt in Bereavement

- A study by Li, Stroebe, Chan, & Chow indicated that guilt might have highly destructive effects on physical and psychological health
- High levels of guilt might need intervention distinct from that for other forms of grief

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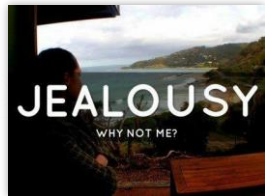
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### Jealousy: A Hidden Emotion in Grief

- Rarely addressed in grief, though it is relatively common
- Related to anger: *Why my child, spouse, sibling?*
- Considered unacceptable
- Can be a factor in shame
- In COVID-19 deaths: *Why did my loved one get sick/die from it when others did not get sick or recovered?*




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### Different Types of Jealousy

- Maternal jealousy: Envy and jealousy when other women have healthy children, even when they have not observed good prenatal care
- Bereaved partner: Jealous that others have their partners
- Jealous of an ex-partner who happily remarried
- Jealousy aroused when finding after a loved one dies and another partner or family
- Siblings: *Mom loved you more*

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### The Primacy of Shame



*The experience of grief cannot be understood without taking an account of the shame that is so covert, yet so diverse and powerful a grief force...shame of violent death, a suicide, a homicide, a comrade in arms dying, accidental death, a specific illness; the death of a person toward whom one feels responsibility*

Kauffman, J. (2010)

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### Shame and Guilt

- Both common in bereavement and both may hinder mourning
- Self-conscious emotions involving self-blame
- Shame—a negative evaluation of self: "I am not good," "Look what I've done"
- Guilt—a negative evaluation of behavior: *My behavior is bad; Look what I've done*
- Can be experienced in both public and private
- Shame associated with feelings of worthlessness and desire to hide, feeling more isolated, less as though one belongs
- Guilt associated with lack of trust, tension, regret, remorse  
(Duncan & Cacciatore, 2015)

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### The White Bear Effect



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### Profiles for Shame and Guilt

- Internal, stable, global attributions
- Avoidance of interpersonal problems and poorer interpersonal problem-solving capacity
- Greater self-concealment (Larson et al., 2015)
- Projection of anger toward others
- Depression, anxiety, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, substance abuse, suicide
- Guilt and counterfactual thinking
- Internal, specific, unstable attributions
- Greater empathy
- Prosocial behavior (Tangney & Dearing, 2002)

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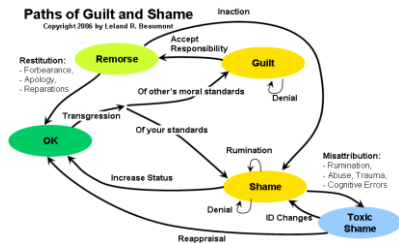
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### One Perspective on Guilt and Shame



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### Guilt and Shame



Important to acknowledge that while guilt and shame can negatively impact bereavement, these emotions also have an important social function  
Shame and guilt can both motivate us to restore relationships

Kelly & Lamia (2018). *The Upside of Shame: Therapeutic Interventions Using the Positive Aspects of a "Negative Emotion."*

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### Anger and Blame

- Sometimes anger, a very normal response to loss, can lead to blame
- Blame as meaning-making: Research on lifeguards and drowning deaths
- Cosmic
- Related to others
- Anger, while normal, can be isolating
- In COVID-19 anger may be directed at God, science, government, medical personnel, stigmatized groups, or the perceived carrier or even sometimes the victim



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### Guilt, Shame, and Self-Blame in Bereaved Parents

- Behavioral and characterological self-blame quite common initially (about 50%), decreasing over time
- Bereaved mothers higher than fathers in self-blame, guilt, and shame
- Guilt decreases for parents who bring children home for palliative care; increases for parents whose children are hospitalized

(Duncan & Cacciatore, 2015)



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### Guilt, Shame, and Self-Blame in Bereaved Parents

- Guilt greater near anniversary of death
- Guilt and shame predict grief intensity at 13 months post-loss
- Bereaved parents use rationalizing, sharing, religion, keeping busy, reading/writing, and forgiving self to mitigate guilt

(Duncan & Caciatore, 2015)

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### A Word of Caution



- Focusing on difficult emotions of grief
- Yet grief is more than emotions
- Worden's Task Model
- Stroebe & Schut, The Dual Process Model

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### Intervening with Difficult Emotions



- Provide safety and validation
- Educate about the difference between shame and guilt (negatively judging the self versus negatively judging one's behavior)
- Help clients identify and verbalize shame and guilt—*name it to tame it*
- When possible, help clients shift from judging the self to changing behavior
- Ventilation
  - Jealousy and two commandments
- The value of well-led support groups

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### Possible Techniques

- Expressive therapies
- Physical approaches to anger (i.e. volcano rooms)
- Using therapeutic metaphors
- Beyond self – gaining perspective: “Would others find you guilty?”
- Empty-chair work
- Journaling
- Spirituality and “enlightened ignorance”: A case of atonement
- Using spiritual rituals
- No silver bullet




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### Technique: Alternative Pasts



- Sometimes this technique can work with unrealistic guilt
- Ask the client to envision possible ways they could have handled the situation
- Explore likely success
- Case: A spouse’s response “I should have made him stop smoking”

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### Interviewing the Internalized Other

- “Interview” the deceased person as they are internalized in the survivor (Moules, 2010)
- Case study: A missed hug
- Among other benefits:
  - Reaffirms bond
  - Finishes business
  - Corrects erroneous perceptions (esp. when witnessed by others)




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### The Value of Therapeutic Ritual

- Liminal
- Bridge to culture and spirituality



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### Therapeutic Rituals

- Continuity
- Transition
- Reconciliation
  - A letter to uncle
- Affirmation



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### Creating Meaningful Rituals



- Arise from narrative
- Objects are visible and symbolic
- Planned and processed
- Use primal elements (Fry)

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### Questions?



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### Upcoming TAPS Institute Programs

June 12, noon—1:30pm ET **Adult Siblings as Disenfranchised Grievers**  
Christina Zampitella, PsyD, FT, The Center for Grief Therapy and Education

June 23, noon—1:30pm ET **Mystical Experiences of the Dying and Bereaved: An Interfaith, Multicultural Perspective**  
Terri Daniel, CT, CCTP, interfaith chaplain and end-of-life educator

Continuing Education (CE) credits will be available for both of these programs

Visit [taps.org/institute](https://taps.org/institute) to learn more and RSVP!

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### Obtain Your CE Certificate

- Go to [educate.taps.org](https://educate.taps.org)  
*If this is your first time obtaining a certificate with us, click "Create a new account"*
- Enter the CE Code: **DEHG**  
*CE Code expires May 6, 2021*
- Complete the exam  
*You must pass at 80% or above and may retake the exam as many times as needed*
- Choose your board category and board
- Complete the program evaluation
- Print your certificate



Questions? Email us at [institute@taps.org](mailto:institute@taps.org)

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Please note: The information provided on this program is intended for educational purposes only. If you or a loved one needs professional support, please contact TAPS 24/7 at 800-959-TAPS (8277).



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About the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing®

Launched in March 2018 through an alliance with HFA, the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing® serves as a resource and training center, providing programs for both professionals working in the field of grief and loss and the public.



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