

GUILT

Nearly all relatives of people with a mental illness feel guilty, at some point, about their relative's or their own situation. Although it may never completely disappear, the feeling can be significantly reduced.

Causes of Guilt:

1. Blaming yourself or regretting your feelings (especially anger), thoughts, or actions regarding your ill relative
2. Feeling bad about having a better life than your relative does (survivor guilt)
3. Society's ostracism of families who have a relative with a mental illness

Effects of Guilt:

1. Depression; lack of energy for the present
2. Dwelling on the past
3. Diminished self-confidence and self-worth
4. Less effectiveness in solving problems and achieving goals
5. Acting like a martyr, in an effort to make up for past sins
6. Being overprotective, which leads to your relative feeling more helpless and dependent
7. Diminished quality of life

Deal with Guilt by Developing more rational & less painful ways of thinking

1. Acknowledge and express your guilt with an understanding listener.
2. Examine the beliefs underlying your guilt. For example, "I should have done things differently when he was a child", "I should have noticed the signs sooner and done something to prevent it", "I should never have said that to her"
3. Counteract these false beliefs, using the information you have learned about the causes and course of mental illness.
4. Try not to dwell on the past.
5. Focus on how you may improve the present and the future for yourself and your ill relative
6. Remind yourself that you deserve a good life even if your relative may not be fortunate enough to have one.

Woolis, Rebecca.(1992), *When Someone You Love Has A Mental Illness – A Handbook for Family Friends and Caregivers*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York