

Ep #7: Why We Feel Guilt in Grief



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Sandy Linda

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You know, there's something about grief that doesn't often make it into the textbooks or therapy sessions. It's that persistent, nagging companion called guilt. Trust me, I felt it's weight on my own hearts. I remember not too long ago sitting in my family room surrounded by memories and echoes of a life once lived. I found myself battling with a relentless question. Should I have done more?

That's the thing about grief. It has a way of making you revisit moments, both big and small, and dissect them with a heavy heart. So whether you're sipping your morning coffee, driving through the rain, or simply seeking comfort in these words, I invite you to join me as we untangle the complexities of guilt in grief. Let's embark on this journey together.

Welcome to *Overcoming Grief*, a show for women experiencing profound grief and looking for support in healing and transforming their lives. If you are ready to heal after loss, create a new self-identity, take responsibility to do the hard things, and get massive results in your life, this show is for you. Now, here's your host, Master Grief and Life Coach, Sandy Linda.

Hello, fabulous listeners. How are you all doing today? As fall approaches in New York City, we have been enjoying cooler temperatures that allow us to savor the last few summer days before the cold weather arrives. Recently, I took a walk on the boardwalk and was able to bask in the crisp, refreshing air while watching the waves roll in.

Now, let me tell you. These walks have been an absolute game changer for me. Not only have they allowed me to maintain my physical endurance, but they also open up a perfect opportunity for some deep thought work. In fact, next month's episodes will be all about how grief can impact our physical health. So stay tuned for that.

But for today, we're diving into a topic that hits home for so many who experience loss, and that word is guilt. Yep, I'm going to explore the complex web of emotions that make up guilt. Let me tell you, it's a conversation that's been brewing within me for quite some time.

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Guilt, my friends, is a complicated and often misunderstood companion on our grief journey. That quiet, endless whisper can escort us through the darkest days and the loneliest of nights. It's that lingering question mark that haunts us making us wonder if we could have, should have, or would have done something differently.

These questions were raised by myself and other grief advocates. Do you carry any guilt that haven't been able to let go up? Are you struggling with the guilt of moving forward without your loved ones? Like many of you, I've faced my share of losses and struggle with guilt in ways I never expected. There was a moment during my journey when I questioned my actions, replayed the conversations, and wonder if I could have done more.

It was a moment of deep reflection. It ultimately led me to explore this topic further, hoping to find answers and provide guidance to others who might be feeling the same way. So if you ever found yourself battling with guilt, whether it's guilt over unspoken words, unresolved conflicts, survivor guilt, or the feeling that you couldn't prevent a loss, this episode is for you. We'll unpack these feelings, share story, and offer insights on how to navigate the often stormy waters of guilt during grief.

Guilt, in the context of grief, is a deeply human emotion. Yet, it's one that we only sometimes discuss openly or understand fully. It's like a shadow that follows us, casting doubt and self-blame on our grieving heart. That's precisely why we're here today.

In our exploration of grief and guilt today, I'm going to uncover some common sources of this complex emotions. Many of us carry the weight of unspoken words and unresolved pain conflicts with our loved ones causing guilt to linger in our hearts. Survivor guilt can be a heavy burden to bear when we lose someone dear to us, the haunting feelings of not being able to prevent a loss can fuel our guilt. Those three I want to unpack for you today.

So allow me to define guilt. So guilt is like that heavy feeling in your gut when you believe you've done something to hurt or offend someone. It's that nagging sense of discomfort, like a knot in your stomach that tells you something's not

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right. Sometimes it's a straightforward kind of guilt. You may have made a mistake and regret your words or action causing you to feel guilty.

Have you ever experienced that nibbling feeling of guilt born, from words left unsaid or conflicts left unresolved? It's like a weight on your heart, a constant reminder of unfinished business. The complex web of guilt stems from unspoken words and remaining conflicts during the grieving process. Let's explore how these unaddressed emotions can shape our grief journey.

Now, I want to go on to say that holding on to guilt without addressing it can take a toll on our bodies and minds. We might experience physical symptoms, self-doubt, and shame, which can decrease our self-esteem. Ultimately, this can cause a lot of mental and emotional distress. It's important to confront our feelings of guilt and find ways to resolve them.

After my sister passed away, I was left with an overwhelming mix of emotion. So many things left unsaid. So many conflicts were unresolved. It made me wonder why she had held such strong feelings of resentment toward me while growing up. We were sisters, and I always believe we have time to work things out.

Unfortunately, fate had other plans. A strange twist of fate led me to discover her journals tucked away in her room. As I started reading through them, I began to gain some insights into why she had such intense feelings. It turned out that being born second had been a source of deep insecurity and jealousy for her. Those journals were a bittersweet gift. Allowed me to finally understand her perspective, even if it was too late for us to have that conversation.

Is survivor guilt a form of grief? Survivor's guilt is a type of a complex grief that can be really tough to deal with. It happens when someone feels guilty for surviving a traumatic event while others didn't make it. They might feel like they could have done something to stop the tragedy from happening. It's like the sadness we feel when someone passes away, but it's even more intense.

People with survivor's guilt often blame themselves and feel like they don't deserve to be alive. It's just a normal part of grieving when you've been through something terrible. Take, for example, for me, tragedy struck around my tight knit family, one by one.

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First it was my beloved mother who had raised me and showered me with wisdom and love. I miss her dearly all the time. Then my older sister that kept her distance from me for years. So the pain of these losses cut deep, but I tried to carry on and holding dear to my father. But in just a short few months after my sister's death, another loss came like an unrelenting storm. My father who had been a pillar of strain was taken away from me. My family members passed away one by one, leaving me feeling like the last leaf clinging to a bare tree in the midst of winter.

With each loss, the survivor guilt began to consume me. I asked the question why was I the last one standing? Why was I the one that survived? Why did my loved ones get taken away so abruptly? The guilt was heavy in my heart, and the weight of it felt unbearable.

However, I sought comfort in the small garden that we had home, a place where I could reflect and remember my family members. It was here under the shade of an ancient oak tree that my dad had grown for years in that has that I found unexpected comfort. I realized that the love and memories I held in my heart were not a burden but a gift.

I decided to honor my family's memory by creating a beautiful memory garden. Each flower and stone was carefully chosen to represent a family member. As time passed, the guilt began to transform into something else. Gratitude. I realized I was the keeper of my family's legacy, empowered with my memories and stories. My survivor guilt had evolved into a deep sense of purpose. I knew my family wanted me to find joy and meaning in life.

Now, guilt over being unable to prevent a loss. Now, this is a natural instinct to want to protect our loved ones. When we can, it can lead to profound guilt. I'm going to give you an example of a story that I recall because when I was in bereavement, I met Sarah who shared her story, and she also had a close knit family and cherished her role as a protector and provider for her children.

But on that one fateful day, her eldest son, Mark, was involved in the car accident that tragically took his life. Despite all her efforts, Sarah couldn't shake the overwhelming guilt that began to consume her. Sarah blames herself for not

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insisting that Mark take her car instead of this old one, which she believed was less safe.

She thought she could have prevented the accident if she had been more persistent or somehow predicted it. The guilt was relentless, and it felt like she had failed in her most crucial duty as a mother, protecting her child. The weight of her guilt became a heavy burden that she struggled to carry, impacting every aspect of her life.

In this example, we see how guilt over not being able to prevent a loss can be a profound and distressing emotion. It's a common experience for those who have lost loved ones and often require support and understanding to navigate and heal from.

Wow, I provided some valuable insights and examples into the origin of guilt during the grieving process. Now, this may have been an emotional charged episode for you, but I hope it empowered you fabulous listeners to recover. It's important to remember that guilt is a natural part of the grieving journey and understanding its origin can help us to heal and move forward. I want to leave you with some key takeaways from today's episode.

Number one is acknowledge your feelings. I always tell people and my clients also to please express your feelings in the most humblest way you can. It's essential to acknowledge and accept the guilt you may be experiencing. It's a natural response to grief and denying it can hinder your healing process.

Number two is seek support. Grief can be an isolating experience. Reach out to support groups or grief advocates who can provide guidance and a safe space to process your emotion. The last one is honor your loved ones. Find meaningful ways to honor the memory of your loved ones. This can be a healing and a transformational process that helps you channel your grief into positive actions.

Remember, you're not alone in your grief journey. We hope this episode has shed light on the origins of guilt and offers some guidance on how to cope with it. So I did do a deep dive into something that touches the hearts of many people who have experienced loss. We have this grieving companion called guilt.

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I went over about how this emotion can be a constant companion and how it could stem from a variety sources, such as unspoken words, unresolved conflicts, survivor guilt, or how can I prevented that loss? I hope you take these valuable insights and take action on your healing journey.

It's important to remember that experiencing guilt is a natural part of the grieving process. We should confront our feelings with the right advocate person that can find ways and help you cope with this sudden guilt that you have. Holding on to guilt without addressing it can cause a lot of mental and emotional distress. That's why it's essential to understand the origins of these complex emotions and have the mental capacity towards healing and moving forward.

So thank you for tuning in today. We'll be back with more insightful discussion. Until then, take care of yourself and those around you. Together, we can navigate the path toward healing and hope. Goodbye for now.

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