

4 Tips to Deal with Happiness Guilt

Grief and guilt often walk hand in hand. When we grieve the death of someone, our minds go to places we wish they wouldn't travel. We ask ourselves, "Could I have done more? Why didn't I do more? Why didn't I tell them I loved them? Did I love them enough?" We tell ourselves our own version of the truth, "I was not enough. I should have done this or that." All these things run through our minds after the death of a treasured person in our life.

It's normal. It's not good, but it's normal. Guilt is part of our human make-up and is usually waiting around the corner. It's important to be intentional about handling our guilt in a way that allows us to walk through grief in a healthy way, and even feel happy.

Once the initial shock and numbness of grief has dulled, we often find ourselves moving into guilt. One day we realize we are smiling and then laughing at something. For a moment, our minds move to something other than our grief and our sense of loss. Then the guilt of feeling happy for a fleeting moment can nearly overwhelm us. We ask ourselves, "How can I be happy? What gives me the right to enjoy life? Does this mean I'm forgetting?"

We feel happy. We feel guilty. We feel sadder than ever. This is what is called "happiness guilt." It may sound strange to our ears, but our hearts know the feeling all too well. You have the right to feel happy. Joy should not be limited to only the happiest of times in our lives. Joy can be found even in the saddest of times. Let me say that again. There is joy even in the saddest of times.

How can it be? We all possess sadness, and we all possess joy. They both dwell within us and if we allow them both the space they deserve, we can live well within that balance. We need to give ourselves the space and permission to grieve deeply and be sad, so we can feel happiness without guilt. Two parts of a whole, a dichotomy of emotion that contributes to a more balanced individual.

These simple steps may help you manage happiness guilt:

1. Give enough space and time for your grief and sadness. Grief and tears need to happen before joy stands a chance.
2. Remind yourself that your loved one would want happiness for you. They wouldn't want you to be stuck in your sadness forever. Embrace joy when it comes.
3. Allow yourself to be in the presence of laughter. Laughter is infectious and feels good!
4. Be kind to yourself. Give yourself the grace to feel joy again.

Remember, it's OK to be happy. It's OK to live a happy life even after the death of someone you love. To live your life fully, even in the presence of sadness, can be a lasting tribute to the person who died. Maybe, just maybe, you allow your grief and sadness to heal you and change who you are so that you become a happier, more balanced you.

Joy lives even in the saddest of times. Claim the tears—whether they be tears of sadness or tears of joy.