



## **Guilt and Worry - (how) can we do without them? (Especially if we are parents)**

Seems like these two powerful emotions come built-in for caring parents (or caring people in general): Worry and Guilt.

And not surprisingly so. Both stem from our reptilian brain, ready to burst into action for our protection. But almost inevitably, in spite of their good intention, they turn our life and our relationships into havoc ...Therefore, once we understand what they want (namely, what WE want...) – we can then choose an alternative strategy to achieve what's REALLY important to us there - with much less suffering to all.

### **Guilt and worry - who needs them, anyway?**

Like any emotion, action, or thought, guilt and worry exist for the purpose of fulfilling some important human need of ours. Particularly, these two emotions are driven by the primal need of SURVIVAL.

**Guilt** – is more socially oriented: it helps us survive within the human tribe by noticing the impact of our actions on others. It aims at awakening us into taking responsibility, especially in cases where an action of ours provoked pain in someone else.

**Worry** – a softer version of fear - is intended at protecting us from possible danger. When having to do with our children, worry aims at awakening us into being vigilant and protective.

Yet our brain cannot discern between real or perceived danger, so it ignites the same waking-up mechanism, no matter the kind of danger. When, for example, your child doesn't do her homework, your brain stores it under "life threat" and BELIEVES it (no homework equals no discipline, equals no success, equals social inadequacy, equals extinction). The automatic response is worry – which turns into anger and demands towards the child.

Here's the sad beauty: These two emotions actually express deep CARE. Yet the WAY we handle them – disrupts our ability to let them fulfill their true, inherent, human purpose.

### **What is the disruption – and what can replace it?**

The disruption happens when we get stuck in those feelings for periods longer than a few minutes... Our emotional balance is then distorted, and the negative impact on our relationships is heavy.

### **How does that happen?**

**Guilt** - occurs AFTER a certain event happened. It tells a story about the PAST.

For instance, tomorrow morning you raise your voice at your child, rushing him (as usual?) to get out the door on time.

You then drive him to school, both of you either silent or arguing, and then you go back home or to work. In any case, the story of what-a-terrible-mother-you-are runs in your head relentlessly, with no exit-point. Even the apology later in the day does not really fix it. The guilt goes to bed with you and the trust is broken.



**Worry** - occurs BEFORE a certain event happened (if at all). It tells a story about the FUTURE. Your daughter didn't dress well enough, and now it's too hot / too cold; She doesn't have enough friends, so how will she ever be accepted; How can you install self-confidence in her; How can you keep her from suffering / cars/ harassment...

And this, too, turns into a never-ending story.

### **So, What Instead?**

Warning: All suggestions below belong to the family of DARING!

1. Agree to see.
2. Understand and Translate.
3. Act differently.

**1. Agree to see** – that you are imprisoned inside your thoughts, while being either in the past (guilt) or in the future (worry). Then – agree to the POSSIBILITY, that you don't HAVE to act upon them, in order to express, do, or create what really matters to you.

**2. Understand and Translate** – that guilt and worry are only STRATEGIES, not your truth. They point at your deep aspirations – to contribute your best to your child, and to protect him or her from any harm.

So, figure out what you can do differently, without guilt or worry, apologies or demands, in order to fulfill those aspirations. And how to remain PRESENT IN THE PRESENT.

Can you ASK your son instead of demanding? Can you express YOUR need to be responsible and arrive at work on time, and ask him to HELP YOU get out the door on time? How can YOU show your care without stressfully calling your daughter three times a day, or answering her text messages when you are at work?

Would you like to act differently with your child? Would you rather have more choice? Consideration? Consciousness? Less confrontations at home? Then -

**3. Act differently** – instead of apologizing (or AFTER you did...) – LISTEN WITH EMPATHY to the distress your son experienced when you raised your voice, or your daughter by your nagging (or your husband by your refusal ).(...

Talk with them. Openly. Listen empathically to THEIR NEEDS AND FEELINGS with no panic. Hear how difficult it is for them when they are scolded, when they don't experience that they are seen or trusted. When they don't trust that THEY matter.

Acknowledge (non-defensively...) anything that you realize you had part in. (Breathe...).

Then, only AFTER you heard them – share with them why you acted as you did and what you'd like from them. You can even express your regret (but with no guilt!).

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**Remember** – that this relationship is precious to you, which is why you so easily get confused between the PURPOSE – care – and the STRATEGY – guilt or worry.

ENJOY the discoveries. The “small” but great moments. The new closeness. The “falling back” into the patterns. The re-awakening. Life.