

Strong Bonds Fact Sheet: Your Feelings : **Feeling Guilty**

It is common for parents to feel guilty when their children experience problems in their lives. No parent is perfect; all make mistakes. Usually our efforts are 'good enough'. There are other things influencing our children as well, like their personality, peer groups or school.

You may be blaming yourself unfairly. Or you may have things to regret. Either way, it is better to focus on the present and the future. Feeling guilty can be a barrier to making things better, so it is useful to try to overcome these feelings.

Feeling Guilty

It can be hard

You may not always be the parent you would like to be. Being a parent is often hard. There are difficult decisions to make at times and difficult things to deal with. You will always feel bad if you expect yourself to be perfect. Good parents can still have kids with problems.

It is better to accept that you are doing your best and will make mistakes from time to time. You will be a better parent if you do – not just because you will feel better about yourself, but because you will show your child that you do not expect them to be perfect either.

I got it wrong

When we look back it often seems obvious that we did the wrong thing. It is important to remember that you can only make decisions with the information and skills that you have at the time. With the extra knowledge and maturity you have gained since, you might do it differently. But you did what you could then.

There are many factors

There are many things that influence a young person. Parenting and family factors are only part. There are also personal characteristics, school, friends, community and particular experiences. (See helpsheet: What Went Wrong? Why?)

Importantly, research shows that a connection with family can help protect children and young people from problems. This means having strong and mainly good relationships with family members.

But that may be all you have control over.

We cannot always protect them

You cannot stop your children from experiencing pain in their lives. They live their own lives, with the experiences that come their way.

You care

The most important thing you do for your children as a parent is to care about what happens to them. Knowing that someone cares and is there for them can help them to overcome their problems but you can't protect them from all life's difficulties. Sometimes this means that you feel guilty because you want to be able to do even more for them or to protect them even more.

Let it go

It is important to move on from feeling guilty. When we get caught up in feeling guilty it is easy to get stuck, unable to take any positive steps. It is best to acknowledge our mistakes, try to learn from them and try to do things differently next time.

Guilt can provoke anger

When we feel guilty about something, we often express it as anger. While we are trying to avoid accepting blame for something that has happened, we might lash out at the people who make us feel guilty. This isn't helpful either.

Apologise

If you have made a mistake, it helps both you and your child. If you are able to tell them you were wrong, say sorry, and try to do things differently next time.

Forgive

We are often much harder on ourselves than we are on others. Forgive yourself for the mistakes you make. Learn from them, and try something different next time.

Talk to someone

When you feel guilty, it often helps to talk to someone about your feelings. Talking can help you work out if you are being too hard on yourself. Or you may see more clearly why you did something and how you may do it differently next time.

If you have really hurt your child, you may both benefit from counselling to resolve feelings of hurt, anger and guilt about it and to ensure the same thing does not happen again.



Tips from this Help Sheet

- No parent is perfect. Everybody makes mistakes.
- Feeling guilty can be a barrier to making things better.
- Other things influence a young person. You may not have control over anything beyond relationships within the family.
- Children will experience pain in their lives. We can't protect them from everything.
- Apologise if you have done something wrong.
- Talk to someone about your guilt. It may help with strategies for the future.



Related Help Sheets

- What went Wrong? Why?
- Parenting Styles
- Feeling Blamed
- Keeping Calm
- Need a Helping Hand?



Strong Bonds

Jesuit Social Services
PO Box 1141
Collingwood Victoria 3066

Tel (03) 9415 8700
Email info@strongbonds.jss.org.au
Web www.strongbonds.jss.org.au