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Parent Guilt

WHAT IT IS, WHY IT EXISTS,
AND HOW TO MANAGE IT.

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Introduction

Parental guilt. You've heard of it, experienced it, and It can totally wreck your day.

One mistake, a moment of being short-tempered, a day of screens, a stop at McDonald's, the choice to use formula, going to work, an unexpected trip to the ER. All of these experiences can send you reeling into guilt mode.

- What if I'm doing things wrong?
- What if my kids don't turn out right?
- What if they grow up to resent me?
- What if they're not healthy?
- What if they're not meeting their potential?
- What if they're not happy?

Parents carry an enormous burden in life. They value their children above almost everything; they also make mistakes, get tired, cry, get angry, buy fast food, get overwhelmed, need a break, and have interests and passions outside of parenting.

In other words, parents are human beings -- just like their children and just like everyone else in the world.

Have you been suffering from a heavy dose of guilt? Is it keeping you from being the best mommy or dada you can be? Are you tired of feeling ashamed and guilty all the time? This eBook can help you work through parental guilt and manage it healthily.

What is Parental Guilt

You've heard of it and probably felt it, but what exactly is it?

Parental guilt is a pervasive feeling that you're failing in some way. You may have anxieties about how your kids are developing or who they will be when they grow up, and you may feel like any problems that arise are entirely your fault. You may worry that they will resent you as adults or need therapy to overcome their childhood.

Another symptom of Parent guilt is feeling like you can't make the right decisions for your kids. So then, when you make a decision, you second-guess yourself, wondering if you're doing the right thing.



You may dwell on past mistakes, becoming ashamed or defeated when you remember things you felt that you did wrong.

Guilt can be mild or severe, and those with unbearable guilt may struggle to have confidence both personally and as a parent.

Things parents feel guilty about

Parent guilt can stem from many sources, but some common reasons parents feel guilty are:

1. **Feeding kids “junk” food.** Parents know that it's their job to feed their kids healthy meals, but pre-packaged foods, fast food, and junk food are easier to grab when life gets busy, or things get overwhelming.
 - a. Many parents feel guilty when they compare themselves to others who never take their kids out for fast food or who only feed their children organic, home-cooked meals.
2. **Too much screen time.** Screen time is another thing that can send parents into the throes of guilt. Parents are told to limit screen time, but screens are all around and can almost be inescapable. Plus, a tv show, tablet, or video game can give a stressed parent some time to relax or get work or house chores done.
3. **Not enough activities.** Many parents feel guilty because they don't feel they have their kids in enough extracurricular activities. They worry that they're not exposing their children to enough and that their kids will be behind their peers.



4. **Not enough time to spend with their kids.** Busy or working parents may feel that they're not spending enough time with their kids.
5. **Not playing with the kids enough.** Some parents are good at joining in playtime with their kids, while others do not enjoy it. Those who don't may feel guilty that they don't like spending time playing with toys or joining in imaginary fun.
6. **Anger or Impatience.** Many parents feel guilty when they raise their voices or become angry with their children.
7. **Saying the wrong thing.** Parents often wonder if they've said or done the right thing regarding parenting. It can be especially tricky to discipline or explain to their child that they've done something wrong.

Sending them to the right kind of school. Many parents wonder if they're sending their kids to the right school. Should they move to a new school district so their kids can attend a better public school? Would it be better if they sent their kids to private school? Should they try homeschooling?

8. **Not protecting them from everything.** Parents often feel guilty when a child gets sick or hurt, wondering if there was something that they could have done to prevent it.
9. **Being too much like their parents.** For example, if someone feels like their parents did a poor job raising them, they may feel guilty when they parent like their parents.
10. **Not being as good a parent as their parents.** Parents who have great parents may feel like they can't live up to their parent's legacy. They may feel like they're always living in the shadow of their childhood.



11. **Comparing themselves to others.** Some Parents regularly feel guilty when they compare themselves to others. For example:
- a. Other parents always look put together in the pickup line.
 - b. Other dads feed their kids home-cooked meals every night.
 - c. Other parents effortlessly run their kids to activities every night of the week.
 - d. Other Parents never lose their tempers.
 - e. Other dads are always calm.
 - f. Other parents limit screen time or don't allow screen time at all.
12. **Not having enough money.** Some Parents can feel sad or guilty when they feel that they can't provide their children with things that other kids can have. Kids may come home and say, "John gets to go to Disneyland," or, "Mary is getting a new game system for Christmas," or, "Kim eats steak for dinner at their house."
- a. These financial comparisons can be hard when they feel like they're not able to provide the same level of comfort -- especially if they live in an area where it seems like other kids are getting more than their kids.
13. **Not breastfeeding.** New moms or moms with newborns are often told of the many benefits of breastfeeding. However, a mother who can't or chooses not to breastfeed may feel guilt when giving her child formula. They may also feel guilt when they see posts on social media of friends who have chosen to breastfeed.
14. **Needing help.** Some parents hate to ask for help, and they can feel guilty when they cannot do everything independently. Asking for help may feel like a weakness, and they may look at other people they think don't need help and feel lesser.
15. **Meltdowns at the store or in public places.** Kids can throw a tantrum anywhere, and parents can often feel guilty and ashamed when it happens in public.
- a. This can be compounded when someone makes an off-handed comment or says something negative about their parenting.
16. **Going to work.** While not necessarily a "Mom" only problem, Women tend to find it more challenging to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Although many parents work outside the home, it is still a significant source of guilt for many working parents. They often feel like they can't divide their time appropriately between work and home life, and this struggle can make them feel discouraged or guilty.

17. **Not contributing to the family income.** Stay-at-home parents can also feel guilty because they're not financially contributing to the family. They may feel like they're not doing enough when money is tight, or the other partner works many hours to provide for the family.
18. **Going on vacation without kids.** Some parents may feel like they need a break without kids, but this idea can make them feel guilty and neglectful of their children.
19. **Self-care.** Many parents feel guilty when they try to care for their needs or care for themselves along the same lines. Children need a lot of love and attention, and taking time away to take care of oneself may cause feelings of guilt.
20. **Having a messy home.** Many families struggle with the guilt of having a home that isn't as clean as they would like. If they take time to clean the house, they feel like they may be neglecting their children. If they take time to spend with their children, they feel like they're neglecting their house duties.
21. **Not losing weight after having a baby.** Many women expect that they need to look and weigh the same as they did before having children. Not being able to fit into pre-pregnancy clothes can be a shame and embarrassment.
22. **Being emotional in front of children.** Sometimes parents may feel like they shouldn't display emotions or become vulnerable in front of their children, and if their kids do witness it, they feel guilty.
23. **Having personal interests.** Many parents have personal interests outside of parenting, but they may feel guilty pursuing them. Raising children takes so much time and energy that there's no time for outside hobbies, and some may feel selfish trying to have them.
24. **Not knowing how to parent a child with special needs.** Parents of kids with special needs have a unique challenge of learning to raise a kid who may have to be parented differently. Unfortunately, not knowing the best way to parent a child with special needs can lead to feelings of guilt and fear.
25. **Needing alone time.** Some parents need some time alone, and these parents may feel guilty when they don't want to spend all of their time with the kids or become irritable when they don't get time to themselves.
26. **Reserving time to exercise.** Exercise is good for the body, and many people feel better when they take the time to exercise. However, that doesn't stop the feeling of guilt that you may be taking time away from your children.

27. **Needing a nap.** Parenting is exhausting, especially for those who have newborns or toddlers to take care of. Parents who nap when their children nap may feel guilty for not getting other things accomplished, even if their bodies need the rest.



28. **Looking at a phone or computer.** Parents worry about how much screen time their kids are getting, but they can also feel guilty when looking at a computer screen, tablet, or cell phone instead of spending time with their kids.
29. **Complaining about parenting or venting to a friend.** Parents will often share their parenting hardships with friends, but they may feel guilty after complaining.
30. **Hiring someone to help out.** Those who don't like asking for help may also feel guilty for hiring someone to help around the house. They may feel like they should be able to do everything themselves, so hiring someone to help clean or look after kids may make them feel inadequate.
31. **Not putting on makeup or getting dressed up.** Sometimes Parents feel bad when they don't get dressed up or put on makeup. Unfortunately, they're most often found in a pair of leggings and a Parent bun, which can cause them to feel like they can't compare to the Parents who look great all the time.

32. **Wanting to put on makeup or get dressed up.** But, on the other hand, Parents who enjoy dressing up or looking nice every day can feel bad when other people make comments like, “Who are you dressing up for?” or, “Do you think you're better than everyone else?”

33. **Making mistakes.** One of the most common sources of guilt is making mistakes. For example, forgetting to change a diaper, misunderstanding a situation and punishing a child wrongly, accidentally missing a sports game or performance, failing to send lunch to school, and picking up a kid late. These mistakes can make a parent feel lousy and send them straight into guilt mode.

Why do parents feel guilt?

Wow! That was a long list of reasons why parents might feel guilty! But why is it that we harbor guilt? Why is it normal for us to feel like we're not measuring up or frequently failing our kids?

Why is parental guilt even a thing? Here are some ideas for why some parents are prone to holding on to guilty feelings, even when they're trying their best.



High Expectations

There are very high expectations for being a parent, and for a good reason. Parents are responsible for feeding, clothing, nurturing, educating, cleaning, loving, disciplining, and playing with their children. That's quite a load! But, in addition, you're charged with such an incredible task - raising a child!

On the other hand, parents are often saddled with unrealistic expectations.

Parents aren't capable of being perfect, no matter how much they wish they could be. As a result, Parents make mistakes, have hard days, and say the wrong thing sometimes. As a result, Parents lose their patience, cry, and get angry sometimes.



Whether it's family, society, or yourself placing that burden on you, it's essential to know that no Parent will do everything right. And those Parents you're comparing yourself to are not perfect, either. They also make mistakes, burn dinner, lose their temper, and wonder if they're doing things right, just like you.

We can't see the future

Parents are burdened with guilt because they won't know if they're succeeding right away. They don't have the privilege of knowing if their parenting strategy is working until later in life.

Since we aren't fortune tellers, we can feel guilty about our decisions because we don't know the future outcome. For example, was a disagreement among their children handled correctly? Did they send them to the right school? Did they give them the proper diet? Did they teach them the right things?

It takes time for parents to see the fruits of their hard work, and they may not know right away that they need to course-correct.

Parents don't know everything

Even if they've read the parenting books, asked for advice, and spent all their teenage years babysitting, we still don't have all the answers.

- What happens when they have a colicky baby that won't settle for hours at a time?
- What about a toddler that melts down twenty times a day?
- What's the correct answer for a defiant child or one who is anxious and gets a bellyache before school every day?
- How about a parent who figures out her first child, only to have a second child who acts and behaves totally differently?

For parents to become seasoned, wise, and experienced, they first have to go through it. And no amount of telling a Parent or dad what to expect can prepare them for what it's really like to be a parent. No one else in the world will have the same exact children in the same actual life situation, so a parent has to grow right in its thick.



As they mature as parents, they will look back at their choices as younger parents. We may regret some of our decisions or how we behaved in certain circumstances. And so, we may have guilt over past mistakes and fear about the future ones.

Parenting advice is conflicting

Parents are inundated with advice, but knowing how to choose the right one is different. Parents get parenting advice from friends, relatives, parents, social media, books, television, pediatricians, other parents, and religious leaders.

And here's what that conflicting advice might look like:

- "Children need discipline."
 - "Never discipline your children."
- "Don't let kids have screen time."
 - "Screen time can be good for kids."

- "Kids need parents who are hands-on and highly involved."
 - "Kids need parents who let them be independent and figure things out on their own."
- "Kids do best in public school."
 - "Kids do best in private school."
 - "Kids do best in homeschool."
- "Don't pick your baby up every time they cry because they won't learn to self-soothe."
 - "Pick up a child every time they cry because it makes them feel safe and secure."
- "Praise your child often so they can become secure and confident."
 - "Don't over-praise your child because it will teach them not to be motivated."
- Children should never be medicated for behavioral problems -- there are better, natural options."
 - "Some kids do better with medications, which vastly improves their quality of life."
- "Potty train your children by the time they're 18 months old."
 - "Let your child tell you when they're ready to potty train. If they're three, four, or five years old, that's okay."
- "You should sleep train your infant."
 - "Let your infant decide their own schedule."
- "Baby-wearing is wonderful for babies and should be used often."
 - "Keeping your baby close to you will make them overly attached."
- "Don't push your teenager towards independence they're not ready for."
 - "Teenagers need to learn independence because they're almost adults."

As stated earlier, parents don't benefit from knowing which parenting style or advice will be best in the long run. They may also follow the advice that simply doesn't fit them or their children.

All the conflicting advice can make a Parent feel discouraged or anxious, and they can often feel guilty about choosing one method over another.

A closer look at a few of the top sources of guilt

There are many reasons why a parent might feel excessive guilt, but we chose a few to carefully go over. Parents and dads have enough to do in life without obsessing over guilty feelings, so we'll talk about three big ones that make us feel guilty: working or staying home, anger, and parent comparisons.

What's better: Stay-at-home or working parent?

Parents feel guilt by deciding whether to work, be a full-time stay-at-home parent, or try to do a hybrid by being a work-at-home parent.

Like conflicting parenting advice, parents get conflicting expectations from society. For example, some people say parents should work, while others say they should be stay-at-home caregivers.



Should parents be solid corporate workers, or should they give up the corporate world and take care of their children at home? Are parents who work worse parents than those who don't? Are parents who don't work freeloaders who don't contribute to the family?

Are parents setting a better example by staying in the workforce, or are they creating a better model by being home?

According to studies and research, every option has its benefits.

The benefits of being a working parent

Parents who work are positive role models to their kids, showing them that women can have a professional career and contribute to society in different ways other than mothering.

According to the New York Times, "In a new study of 50,000 adults in 25 countries, daughters of working mothers completed more years of education, were more likely to be employed and in supervisory roles and earned higher incomes."

The article also stated that men who had been raised by working parents were more likely to contribute to household chores and help care for their children.

Some studies show that working parents are less prone to depression and that children who have a working Parent are just as well behaved, if not more well behaved, than kids with stay-at-home parents.

Although working parents spend less overall time with their kids, they sometimes spend more quality time when they're fully engaged.

Of course, there's the obvious benefit of working parents bringing home more financial stability to the home and lessening the stress of finances. Plus, many working parents find a great deal of personal fulfillment from their careers and feel that their work is essential and worthwhile.

That sense of accomplishment can help build confidence and self-worth.

The benefits of being a stay-at-home parent

On the other hand, there are many benefits to being a stay-at-home Parent. For one thing, parents who stay home avoid the high costs of childcare. So, while they're not adding to the collective budget, they're also helping keep money in the bank.

Stay-at-home parents who take care of domestic duties like childcare, grocery shopping, house cleaning, and cooking meals keep families from having to pay for outside services.

According to Salary.com, the work that stay-at-home parents do is worth around \$162,581 a year, well above the average income in the United States.

A 2014 study kept track of 68,000 children and found that children with one stay-at-home parent perform better in school than those with two working parents. In addition, a different study shows that children who stay at home in their early childhood show lower levels of stress than those who go to daycare.

Choosing what is best for your family

We could go on and on about the pros and cons of being a working parent or a stay-at-home parent. But unfortunately, the so-called "mommy wars" have been going on for some time, with parents feeling like they need to take a side -- firmly state which one is better for their kids.

The question isn't really which is better for everyone else, but what's better for your family. What works for another may not work for you or your family.

You may be a woman who has worked hard at a career for many years who now believes it's best to become a full-time parent instead. On the other hand, you may be a stay-at-home parent who feels it's time to enter the workforce after a long hiatus. Either way, it's a personal decision that's yours to make.

People will try to sway you to their perspective, but it doesn't really matter what other people think. Studies are conducted that say one or the other has benefits. You can cherry-pick the data to make one seem better than the other, but both have positives and negatives.

Choose what you think is best at the time. You can always change your mind later or adjust if something isn't working. For example, if you feel like you're working too much, you might be able to go part-time, or perhaps you can have some days where you work from home.

If you feel your family income is too low or feel more fulfilled and happier when you're in the workforce, you can start working part-time and, as your schedule opens, work your way into a full-time position.

It's your life, and you get to write your story. When you've chosen what you think is right, drop the guilt and feel confident in your decision. Your kids will be best served by a parent who isn't strapped by the burden of responsibility, whether you are a stay-at-home parent or a work outside of the home Parent.

Why parents get angry sometimes, and how to deal with anger

The kids left their shoes in front of the door -- again. Everyone ate dinner and left you a mess. The baby didn't sleep last night, and you haven't had a good night's sleep in months. One of your children has a cough that has you concerned, and two of the kids have been fighting nonstop for days.



Just when you feel like you might be at your breaking point, you discover the check engine light in your vehicle. As you get the baby out of her car seat, she throws up all over herself. The two kids who have been fighting have now hit max volume.

You can't take it anymore, and you find yourself yelling at all your kids. The baby starts crying, and the other children look scared or confused. This is a level of anger you don't understand and doesn't even feel natural to you.

You're not an angry person, but recently you feel on the edge of anger.

Once you've calmed down, you're rushed with a sense of guilt. This guilt doesn't leave when you're done cleaning up the baby or when the kids start playing again. Instead, it haunts you, maybe for days or even months.

Every parent experiences anger from time to time. Every parent will lose their cool and say or do something out of anger that they may regret later



Although parents are tasked with teaching their children how to handle big emotions, parents also experience them. And even though we would like to remain calm and steadfast in every moment of life, there will be times when we won't.

Many parents feel ashamed after losing their temper, and they may be afraid or embarrassed to talk about it. Parents want to be a shining example to their children, and when they lose control of their emotions, they can feel very guilt-ridden.

Okay, Parent, take a deep breath. First, let's talk about why parents get angry, and then we'll share some helpful ideas for dispelling the anger healthily.

Why parents get angry

Parents get angry because raising kids is hard! But life can be complicated even without kids, so what's happening with parents losing their temper?



Here are a few reasons why you may be feeling outraged:

1. **Lack of sleep.** Sleep is essential for a healthy life, and it helps regulate emotions and maintain mental stability. If you've been running on little sleep for a long time, it's no surprise that you might have a short fuse.
2. **Kids don't meet expectations.** Unfortunately, when our kids don't meet our expectations, it can often lead to anger.
 - a. Some of this anger can stem from embarrassment or fear. For example, You may feel shame when your kids misbehave, and you think others will judge your parenting or your children or fear that they'll grow up and become adults who are irresponsible or who have bad character.
3. **Anxiety.** Parents prone to anxiety may become overwhelmed when things feel out of control. This chaos may result in fear and distress, resulting in anger.
4. **Ongoing stress.** Parenting can be challenging enough, but the danger increases when you add outside stressors such as financial problems, health issues, or conflict with a spouse or partner.
5. **No knowledge of how to handle anger.** If you haven't been taught how to work through your angry feelings, you may not know how to deal with them when they creep in.
 - a. Maybe you avoid complicated feelings, but now you're being pressed in new ways as a parent, and you can't escape the reactions you're experiencing.

How to nip anger in the bud

You won't be able to avoid the emotion of anger forever. In fact, anger is a normal emotion that everyone will experience. Trying to avoid ever feeling angry is like trying not to be a human. The goal isn't to avoid getting angry but rather to channel the anger healthily and not let the anger get out of control.

With that caveat in mind, here are some things you can do to help reduce Parent rage:

1. **Get some rest.** This can be an almost impossible task when you have a baby or toddler who doesn't sleep. But there are some things you may want to consider to help you get that much-needed rest:
 - a. If you can, sleep when they nap. You have many things to do, but you will be better equipped to handle those things if you're not a zombie.

- b. Ask your partner to give you some time to sleep. Many parents don't like asking for help, even from a spouse, but it's okay to say you need some sleep when you're not getting enough.
 - c. Ask a friend or family member for help. Parents may be even less likely to ask for help from someone outside the house, but desperate times call for desperate measures. Plus, it's not exactly a hardship to ask a grandparent to hold a baby for a time.
 - d. Hire some help. There's no shame in hiring a helper or babysitter to help watch the kids so you can get some sleep.
- 2. **Have realistic expectations for your children.** Your anger towards your children may result from having expectations they can't meet. Having a good understanding of what's developmentally possible for children at different ages can help.
 - a. It's also important to remind yourself that all kids develop at different rates, and while one child may be capable of something, a sibling may not be able to at the same age.
- 3. **Have realistic expectations for yourself.** A parent can't always cook healthy, organic meals, keep the entire house spotless, have all of her children dressed and Instagram-ready, ensure that her children behave, handle every dispute perfectly, get everyone to school and extracurricular activities, and remain perfectly calm, kind, and happy at all times.
 - a. Parents can do many beautiful things, but expecting yourself to be perfect will leave you frustrated, sad, and even angry.
- 4. **Take some time for yourself.** There's no shame in meeting your own needs.
 - a. Hire a babysitter, get a grandparent to watch the kids; go out for dinner, go to the movies with friends, or even for some alone time.
 - b. Have times built into the day when children rest or take a quiet time in their room. They can still play quietly with some favorite toys or read a book if they're too old to nap.
 - c. Schedule date nights with your significant other. Take these times to do something you both enjoy doing outside the house and without the responsibility of parenthood.
 - d. Whatever makes you feel like yourself – ensure that you take time to do those things, even if it takes a little extra effort to make it happen.

5. **Talk with a therapist or a specialist.** Sometimes rage or anger requires more than some time off or a good night's sleep. In some cases, parents could benefit from speaking to a therapist.
 - a. Perhaps the anger you're experiencing comes from past trauma, or it could be stemming from a mental health issue like anxiety or depression.
 - b. If you feel that your anger is more than you can handle on your own, there's no shame in talking to someone to help you manage your feelings.

Put a death to comparisons

Comparison can be healthy if it helps you do better. Comparing yourself to other parents can, at times, be inspiring or educational. You may learn about a better way to raise your children or feel inspired to do something new or different.



Learning from or being inspired by someone is not the same as feeling guilty, embarrassed, or defensive.

When comparisons leave you feeling ashamed, they're no longer productive.

The parents on social media who seem to have the perfect family have the same struggles in life. Their kids argue, make messes, and do the wrong thing. Sometimes, those parents lose their temper, make mistakes, and burn dinner.

The older person at the grocery store judging you because your kid is melting down either never had children of their own or has forgotten what it's like to raise children.

On television, the mom and dad always say the right thing, serve excellent meals every night, and are always kind – they may be good role models, but they're not real people.

Most importantly, don't fall into the trap of comparing your kids to other people's kids:

- Your kid walked at eighteen months, but your sister's kid walked at 9 months? That's okay. They're just developing differently.
- Your neighbor's son is exceptionally athletic while your son isn't? Good for your neighbor, but it doesn't take any worth from you or your child.

Be happy for others and their accomplishments. But don't feel like their achievements take anything away from you as a parent. Your strengths are not their strengths and vice versa.

Most people are unaware of the actual struggles that everyone else experiences, thinking that they're the only ones who don't have all the answers or the only ones who fail from time to time.

Use other parents to inspire you to be better but avoid allowing it to cross over into a comparison battle that makes you feel bad about yourself.

Take it easy on yourself

If you're feeling bad about your parenting, here are a few internet jokes to help pull you out of your guilt and maybe give you a laugh.

- "Don't be too hard on yourself. The mom from ET had an alien living in her basement for days and didn't notice."

- One meme states, "I would like to work full-time and be with my kids full-time. And I would like a unicorn that is also a time machine."
- Another says, "All these moms are on Pinterest making their own soap and reindeer-shaped treats, and I'm like, 'I took a shower and kept the kids alive.'"
- And lastly, "If you're feeling guilty about your kids watching too much TV, put the subtitles on and mute the sound. Now they're reading!"

Now that you maybe have a smile on your face, listen when we tell you that you're doing okay. Be kind to your kids, but also be kind to yourself. Don't let the weight of guilt crush you as a Parent.



Learn from your mistakes, ask your children for forgiveness when you've done something wrong, and do your best. Tomorrow is a new day and a new opportunity. Of course, you will continue to make mistakes as you go, but you will also grow and become an even better, stronger, and more capable parent. You've got this!

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