

## Module 3. Lesson 17. Forgive Yourself.

# Feel Better About Yourself by Leaving the Burden of Guilt Behind

In the last lesson, you learned how to let go of your mistakes. But sometimes, the guilt still remains. Only sociopaths are able to completely avoid guilt. ***Feelings of guilt are distressing and draining.*** What can be done about it now?

**Get over your guilt with these strategies:**

1. **Determine if you should feel guilty.** Whose standards are you using? Your parents'? Your own? Your church's? Can you be sure the source is correct? Ensure that you're judging yourself by a set of standards you deem to be worthy. It's your choice.
2. **Learn from it.** Why do you feel guilty? Obviously, you did or said something that you consider to be wrong. Once you know why you feel guilty, you're in a position to benefit from it. ***Ensure that you don't repeat the behavior in the future.***
  - Visualize yourself behaving in a new and improved manner.
3. **Sometimes guilt is unproductive.** Imagine that you feel guilty about missing your child's play because you were required to work. If you did everything within your power, there's no benefit to feeling guilty. ***Does your behavior require modification? If not, there's no reason to feel guilty.***
4. **Apologize.** It can be as simple as saying you're sorry. You'll feel better afterwards, even if your apology is rejected.
5. **Accept that you feel guilty.** Acknowledge your feelings and the pain that goes with them. Accept that you made a mistake. Realize that it will pass.
6. **Forgive yourself.** Even if the other person won't forgive you, you can forgive yourself. Be kind and gentle with yourself. No one is perfect.
7. **Let it go.** Once the event is over, you've apologized, and modified your behavior, let it go. At that point, what purpose does your guilt serve? Take

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a deep breath, let it out, and move on. **Keep your mind occupied with more productive thoughts.**

8. **Have gratitude.** Rather than saying to yourself, “*I should have told Mary the truth*”, tell yourself, “*I’m grateful I’ve learned the importance of honesty.*” Negative experiences can still be worthy of gratitude.

### Avoid guilt in the future:

1. **Think instead of react.** Guilt is often the result of acting without thinking. **When you become emotional, take a moment to collect yourself.** It’s easy to do or say something that you’ll later regret.
2. **Be less critical of yourself.** Guilt and the need to be perfect go hand in hand. **Avoid expecting perfection.** It’s unrealistic and leads to feelings of guilt. Everyone makes mistakes on a daily basis.
3. **Create realistic beliefs.** Maybe you believe that a good parent should do certain things, but you don’t or can’t do them. Are you sure your opinion on the matter is reasonable? Maybe you believe that a good parent would never get frustrated, which is unrealistic.

You’re not alone in feeling guilty. Some people spend a lifetime wallowing in guilt. **How long you feel guilty is up to you.** Learn from your mistakes and go forward with a new perspective and strategy. Apologize and forgive yourself.

**The real shame is repeating behavior that results in guilt.** Avoid repeating your mistakes and be gentle with yourself. **Practice making the choice that doesn’t result in guilt.** The more you practice, the more healthy choices you’ll make, and the less guilt you’ll have to deal with.

### Still having trouble forgiving yourself?

Consider this 4-step process:

### The 4 Most Important Steps to Forgiving Yourself

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Sometimes, it's difficult to forgive your own missteps. You feel really rotten when you've let yourself or someone else down. But one day, you have to allow the sun to shine again. Has it been challenging to do that?

**This 4-step process can help you forgive yourself and move on with your life:**

- 1. Confront your mistake.** In all circumstances, take responsibility for your error. Come face to face with it and acknowledge where you stumbled. As painful as it might be, this is the first step to forgiving yourself.
  - It's sometimes helpful to look in the mirror and say aloud what you did. It connects you with the action. ***It also helps you realize that it's okay to make mistakes.***
  - Therapy can help if the first option doesn't do the trick. Talking to someone else may help you release feelings that are tied down inside.
- 2. Analyze the impact. *Take a moment to reflect on the outcome of your actions.*** Who has been affected? How badly were you or others hurt? Take it all at face value, and avoid embellishing it with undeserved emotion.
  - Take the time to consider the impact outside of what you initially see. It's sometimes easy to overlook the smaller impact when the greater one is overwhelming.
- 3. Accept your human imperfections.** Above all, be kind to yourself. Remind yourself that you're human. There's nobody on the face of the earth who goes through life without making mistakes. However, it's important to remember that this doesn't excuse what happened.
  - While accepting your human imperfections, take the time to identify your shortcomings. Use the opportunity to work on aspects of yourself that you might want to improve. Perhaps you'd like to further develop certain character traits or strengthen your skills in particular areas.
  - When apologizing to yourself and others, you can point out that everybody makes mistakes, but you've learned from yours and have every intention of not repeating it.

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4. **Challenge yourself to do better. *The crucial final step to self-forgiveness is challenging yourself to do better.*** In the previous step, you accepted your imperfections. Now it's time to work at fixing the things you can.
- Is it that you need to learn to be nicer to others? You can work on that through conscious effort or group therapy.
  - Try not to repeat the same mistake. That's one of the easiest ways to backslide and end up at square one again.
  - Ask your supportive friends and family to help you on your journey. Remember that no man is an island.

Making things right might not happen overnight. ***What's important is that you forgive yourself and commit to turning things around.***

You're full of so much potential. That potential sits unused while you consume yourself with negative energy. Lift yourself up! Come to terms with the fact that you have so much more to give to the world. Chip away at the negativity until all that's left is your renewed spirit.

The next lesson will help you chip away at that negativity as you leave your inner critic behind!

### **Here's what you need to do today:**

In your journal, write down a mistake that you're having trouble forgiving yourself for. Follow this process:

1. Confront your mistake.
2. Analyze the impact
3. Accept your human imperfection
4. Vow that you won't make the same mistake again. Take action to ensure a more positive outcome in similar situations.