



How to Get Over Guilt & Reduce Regrets: 7 Essential Steps

What would you do differently if you had the chance?

Ask a person about something he or she regrets and you will learn a lot. Everyone can think of at least one thing they wish they had done another way. But the guilt over past mistakes or perceived faulty decisions can become paralyzing if it consumes us. Regrets can either burden your life or motivate you to move forward. You cannot undo or redo what has been done or not done, but you can take steps to get over the guilt and move past regrets.

Below are seven essential steps to reframing your regrets and doubts of the past to the possibilities of today:

Understand it

Occasionally we go through life unhappily, but not truly knowing why. Regret may be contributing to this feeling. Being regretful involves feeling bad about something you wish you had done differently. You may regret things you DID DO (regret of action), or regret things you DIDN'T DO (regret of inaction). Understand the source of your remorse. Also, acknowledge your rationale of doing or not doing whatever happened at the time.

Grieve it

Before you can accept that what's done is done, you need to grieve the regrets that are presently holding you hostage. If you feel you have missed out on an opportunity because of decisions from the past – such as not having children or not being closer with a family member, then grieve that loss if it is too late to alter it.

Express it

Write your feelings out – if only just for yourself. Bring these swarming, remorseful feelings out of your head and onto paper. Write them in a journal, or write on a piece of paper to toss. Sometimes we have the opportunity to apologize if we regret how we handled a situation with another person. If there is something you can do now, do it! Forgive, make amends, and convey your regret. Other times we do not have that chance, but we still need to express these upsetting emotions that could be limiting our present happiness.

Accept it

Some regrets can be devastating and are not to be minimized. But there is no “delete” button for past actions, or inactions. And while it may be very difficult, try to find some element of good that has come from that situation. We have no choice but to accept what has happened and to think of the current options we do have.

Get over it

While you may not be able to get over the consequences of prior decisions, you can let go of obsessing over them. Stop “beating yourself up” emotionally because of yesterday’s decisions. Realize the negative consequences of holding onto the past. Remove the words, “If only...then” from your vocabulary. Understand that worrying about the past is a potent prescription for stress and health problems. Do not make the guilty feelings more powerful by your fixation with them. You deserve to be good to yourself, and have others be good to you too.

Learn from it

Make changes in your behavior to avoid similar faulty situations and decisions that brought you guilt in the past. Do not lose the lesson from the supposed loss. Consider what you could do differently today, and start moving that way. How can you be a better parent, a better friend, or a better spouse?

Grow past it

Assess what choices you do have! It is never too late for many life opportunities – to go back to school or to learn a new skill, to connect with others in meaningful relationships, or to change your negative self-perception or attitude. Grow past the pain. Grow past the shame. Be deliberate. Be active. Be involved in things that will bring you gladness, not guilt, for today and for the future.

For more information or for support for you or your family, contact Centerstone at (615) 460-HELP (4357).

About Centerstone

Centerstone (www.centerstone.org), a not-for-profit organization, is the largest behavioral healthcare provider in Tennessee and the ninth largest in the nation. Serving the community for more than fifty years, Centerstone provides a full range of behavioral health and related educational services to individuals of all ages and their families. Centerstone is devoted to research that seeks to identify, treat and eliminate mental illness. Centerstone provides services to more than 50,000 individuals annually. Children, adolescents, adults, seniors, and families all receive help from a multitude of different programs at more than 65 facilities and 140 partnership locations throughout the region. For more information about Centerstone, please call (615) 460-4357 or toll free at (888) 291-4357.

About Susan Gillpatrick, MEd, LPC, CTS

Susan Gillpatrick, Centerstone Crisis Management Specialist, primarily works in the field with clients in critical incident response situations, and in Centerstone’s wellness trainings and presentations. She is also responsible for planning and implementing marketing and growth strategies for Centerstone’s Crisis Management Strategies.

In recent years, Ms. Gillpatrick worked for the Shelby County Government Victims Assistance Center in Memphis. There, she co-developed a model program for the state of Tennessee entitled, “Homicide Response.” Her work in this area received the 2000 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties.

Ms. Gillpatrick is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Trauma Specialist, Certified Workplace Conflict Mediator, and Mental Health Service Provider in the state of Tennessee and a National Certified Counselor. She is also a member the American Counseling Association, the Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists, the Tennessee Mental Health Counseling Association, and the Middle Tennessee Employee Assistance Professionals Association. She is a frequent presenter at local and national conferences, and has had numerous articles published. She received her Master of Education degree in Human Development Counseling from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University.

To request Susan Gillpatrick to speak with your group or organization about complete wellness in living, contact her at (615) 460-4445 or susan.gillpatrick@centerstone.org.