Guilt is a **cognitive** or an **emotional** experience that occurs when a person **realizes** or **believes**—accurately or not—that he or she has violated a **moral** standard, and bears significant responsibility for that violation. It is closely related to the concept of **remorse**. 

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guilt

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Caregiver Self-assessment Questionnaire  
www.pbs.org/caringforyourparents

The Irony of Caregiver Guilt  
www.caregiver.com

Feel at Peace: Lose the Caregiver Guilt  
www.agingcare.com

Managing Caregiver Guilt  
http://in-lawsuite.com

Caregiver Guilt  
www.caregiver.com

Eight Tips to Manage Caregiver Guilt  
www.caregiver.com

Caregiver's Handbook: Why Caregivers Need Care Support Groups & Services  
www.pbs.org

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Reflect on the caregiving responsibility: What is **reasonable**.

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Check your **motivation** and check the motivation of the one being cared for.

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**Adjust** the plan: Delegate; if this is not an option then look to outside supports.
Feel at Peace: Lose the Caregiver Guilt

Carol Bradley Bursack

Scene one: The first call of the day from your mom you can handle.

"Oh, hi, Mom. Yes, it's a pretty day. Maybe you should walk down the hall and see Marian?" You chat awhile and then say, "Bye. Love you, too."

Five minutes pass. You answer the ringing phone again.

"Hi, Mom. Yes, it's a pretty day. Are you going down to see Marian, like I suggested when you called earlier? (this seems polite and gentle). "Yeah, you did call earlier. You just forgot. No problem. Love you. Bye."

Six more minutes and the phone rings again. You see it on caller ID. And you ignore it. The rule of three has kicked in and you let it go. You know Mom's okay as you've already talked. She has heard your voice. It's okay to ignore the call. But still, you feel guilty.

Get used to it – the guilt I mean. The phone thing was just one of the games I had to play. When Mom would call the first time, I'd answer and see how she was doing. The second time, I'd gently try to let her know she had just called. The third time – well, sometimes it just seemed better to ignore it. I knew she would be embarrassed (or else think I was lying, depending on the day) if I told her she'd called three times within 15 minutes. It seemed kinder to just not answer the phone and let her forget that she called.

Guilt has a purpose in life. If we are mean, we should feel guilty. If we owe someone an apology, we should be big enough to do so. But guilt is a complicated emotion. We take on the expectations of our culture, our religion, our family. And then we take on the expectations of our toughest critic – ourselves. That committee that meets in our head tells us we are not doing this caregiving thing well enough. If we were "good" people, we'd just keep answering the phone endlessly until Mom found something else to do.

Why Caregivers Feel Guilty

Scene two: You're visiting Mom in her apartment and you've been there long enough to do laundry and clean up the bathroom and kitchen. You visit a bit. She is watching her favorite show on TV, which you hate, but she wants your company. You've got kids coming home, but not for awhile. Would a little white lie be okay? I mean, is it awful to want to have a half-hour between Mom and kids; a half-hour for yourself to regain some sense of tranquility?

You say to Mom, "Jenny's coming home, so I'd better get going. You enjoy your show and I'll check with you
Then you run out and jump in your car, drive home and grab a soda. You put up your feet and listen to the blessed silence. And feel guilty.

Again, get used to it. These are typical caregiver guilt feelings. You never will do it all so well that everyone is happy. You have to remember that you, too, are part of the equation. Talk with other caregivers. When people feel safe, as they often do in a group or even chatting with one other caregiver, they let down their guard. They can admit that they do the same thing.

Much of the guilt caregivers feel is, like the above, rather minimal in nature. However, there are things that linger after death that can cause guilt as well – or perhaps just regret. It's hard to say which.

**Start Forgiving Yourself To Stop Guilt**

I remember a time when I wrote my grandma, who lived two hundred miles away, a letter once a week. She told me once how much those letters meant to her. But then – in my mind it was right after that letter from her telling me how much she loved our correspondence, but more likely it was a month or two – I went through a serious personal crisis. Her regular supply of letters from me dried up. Eventually I returned to writing her, but I had moved several states away and she had declined. I wasn't even there when she died. I feel guilt about that.

While I'm baring my soul, I'll say I wish I had known more about the need for physical touch later as my parents were dying. I was there. I was present. And yes, I did talk to them, touch them and keep them comfortable. However, as I've read more about physical death and the dying, as I've studied more hospice material, as I've talked with more people who have attended more deathbeds, I've found myself feeling guilty. I feel that I was less than perfect in how I handled their deaths.

Does my guilt over any of these things help anyone now? That is what I have to ask myself when I find my mind mulling over these old issues. Nothing, absolutely nothing, can change things. I didn't do anything terrible. I just didn't do my "caregiving" as perfectly as I'd like to have done. Wallowing in guilt helps no one.

My solution? Move forward. Tell people my stories. Tell them my successes and my failures. When I do that, it gives me hope. I think that maybe one more person will hold their loved one more, comb his or her hair, lotion his or her skin – just spend more time touching than they would have spent had I not told my story. And maybe there's someone reading this who has neglected writing a note to an elder because he or she is "too busy." Maybe that person will sit down and write. If that happens, then I've made my amends. It's all I can do, as I can't live my life over, nor do I want to.

Then I need to forgive myself for all of my imperfections. I am human. I do my best with what I have at the moment, and that has to be good enough. Guilt erodes the soul. Be done with it.
Author, columnist and speaker Carol Bradley Bursack wrote "Minding Our Elders: Caregivers Share Their Personal Stories" and is the moderator of the AgingCare.com community. Read full biography

The Community for Family Caregivers is an online forum created to Support Caregivers of Elderly and Aging Parents. The material of this web site is provided for informational purposes only. AgingCare.com does not provide medical advice, diagnosis or treatment; or legal, financial or any other professional services advice.

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Managing Caregiver Guilt

by Tom on June 12, 2010

The decision to become a caregiver of a loved one is not an easy one to make. If it’s a spouse or child, there is no question. However, when it’s a parent, there’s a feeling of anxiety. If you have siblings, then anxiety may be accompanied by resentment for having to be the one to make the decision. Then guilt sets in. Your parent took care of you, and now you just feel obligated.

Guilt is debilitating and doesn’t just affect you, but also your family and your loved one. Eventually, your initial decision to do something hopeful will lead to destruction. Even when relatives praise you or your loved one thanks you, you will still feel a sense of guilt.

Oftentimes, you feel guilty simply because you are in good health and your loved one is not. Your loved one is elderly, and that is a circumstance out of your control. Feeling guilty about it only distracts you from your task.

What is Caregiver Guilt?

Caregiver guilt is sometimes an emotion that conceals resentment, anger, or simply exhaustion. Taking care of a loved one is not an easy task. It can drain you of all your patience, eat away at your personal life, and occupy your life completely. You may resent your siblings for not doing their part, and you may resent your loved one for needing you. Resentment leads to anger, and ultimately these negative emotions fester into guilt. It is important that you recognize the underlying emotions that cause the guilt, in order to move on in peace.

Know When To Ask For Help

If you resent the fact that you have no life, get a life. Taking care of a loved one should not hinder your needs. Just like having children, parents may feel they need some time alone, and when this is the case, they call in a helper for some relief. As a caregiver, you can do the same thing. And if you feel guilty for taking time away from your loved one, make sure you give him or her some fun time too. Create a balance. Your loved one might feel resentful and angry too if they sense you are burdened by them.

Put Yourself In Their Shoes

A parent suddenly feels like the child, and this can cause resentment and anger. They don’t want to feel like a burden, but if you, as a caregiver, are retaining all these negative emotions, you may inadvertently reveal your true feelings to your loved one. It could be in the tone of your voice, a gesture, or a look. With so many negative emotions flying around, animosity will grow and fester, and only bad things can come out of the situation.

Losing the guilt means understanding the situation and reminding yourself that you had a choice, even if the other options were not to your liking. Don’t be a martyr. You are a good person for taking on the burden, but if you reveal your burden to others as a complaint, the good becomes soiled. Find an outlet, like an online forum where other caregivers share situations and feelings. When you realize that you’re not alone, care giving will be easier to bear.

Give Care To Yourself Too

Caregivers need to be well in mind and body. You cannot be a good caretaker if you don’t take care of yourself. Consider relaxing or meditative outlets, such as yoga, Tai Chi, hiking, or long walks. Look to your faith for strength. You must have a strong mind and
body to be the best caregiver that you can be. It starts with you. If you are well, your loved one will be well, and your family will be well. No pressure!