

Anxiety and Guilt

Anxiety is a condition looking for content. It is a natural response to ambiguity - when we do not know what is happening we do not know how to respond. Anxiety seeks resolution of ambiguity.

Four types of guilt are common, and each requires a different type of intervention.

1. **Potential Guilt Potential:**

- ✧ Feeling guilty for something you maybe did wrong or possible negative outcome of an action.
- ✧ This guilt is never resolvable - no way to determine if it is real or what to do about it.
- ✧ Process for resolving:
 - ✦ Determine if feeling guilty is serving some unrecognized purpose
 - ✦ Use thought stopping/thought replacing

2. **Legitimate Guilt** - If you have felt you have done things wrong - even if others do not know - you need a process to make amends. Keeping quiet about it makes it bigger and less amenable to logic.

- ✧ Process for resolving:
 - ✦ Write down what you did wrong - just the facts, not the excuses or distortions
 - ✦ Talk it over with someone safe
 - ✦ Decide what will make restitution
 - Cases where restitution can be made
 - If you cannot make restitution then consider a living amends, live in a new way
 - ✦ Make restitution

3. **Perfectionist Guilt** - Guilt for failing to achieve standards you set for yourself. Anxiety always returns so the bar is raised.

- ✧ Process for resolving:
 - ✦ Use cognitive behavioral tools to work on self defeating beliefs
 - ✦ Write down your guilty feelings
 - ✦ Identify any self defeating beliefs or cognitive distortions
 - ✦ Use the emotional scale and your thoughts to climb up to a new feeling place.

4. **Guilt for Being Anxious** - Guilt for failing to overcome the guilt. Some people believe their lack of faith or insufficient prayer is the cause of anxiety.

- ✧ Use the process for perfectionist guilt to help resolve this type