

5 STEPS TO ESCAPING TOXIC GUILT (Taken from the book “Escaping Toxic Guilt” by Susan Carrell)

STEP ONE - SPEAK YOUR TRUTH

Acknowledge what’s going on and stop hiding the truth from yourself because you think the way you feel makes you a bad person.

Once you’ve been honest with yourself, share this with someone you trust and respect.

If you feel you can’t share your truth with another person, journal it. This helps in many ways, including allowing you to express and release uncomfortable thoughts and feelings, helping you to make sense of them, and helping you prepare for verbal sharing with someone else.

STEP TWO - CLAIM YOUR EMOTIONAL TERRITORY

Learn to stand up for yourself, make your own decisions, and do what you want to do. This takes a lot of practice but is essential to releasing guilt.

In order to do this, you need a healthy sense of self – respect for your own health and well-being. Know that your needs and desires are just as important as anyone else’s.

Language is EXTREMELY important during this step – the words you use create impressions and make things happen. Here are some examples of statements you can use:

- No, thank you
- I’m sorry, but that won’t work for me
- This isn’t what we agreed to
- I know you don’t agree, but it’s my decision
- This is who I am
- Thank you, but I think I’ll pass

Sometimes, we are unable to claim our territory because we need approval from others, or we let others walk over our territory because we feel insecure and want to please others. This is a sign that it’s time to set healthy boundaries (you can go back to my post on setting boundaries when you’re an empath, as I touch on this here). One way to do this with our children is to sit down and decide on the house rules, with penalties if they’re not respected. Keep it simple, it could be based on school results, helping at home, or going out. Make sure the consequences (penalties) are specific, otherwise it won’t work.

STEP THREE - BRACE FOR THE STORM

When you begin to reclaim your territory, people probably won’t like it, so you need to prepare for this especially as disapproval can seem unbearable if you feel guilty.

As a parent, you need and deserve non-work-related time away from your children. It’s not always easy but trying the following can make it easier to ride the storm when the children resist the changes you’re trying to implement.

- Put a lock on your bedroom door – it’s important to have a safe haven to call your own
- Find a babysitter (if your children need one) or someone who can look after your children while you take down-time for yourself
- Make regular dates with friends, family, your other half, and honour them – it doesn’t have to be expensive, it can be something like a trip to the beach, picnic in a park or visit to a museum
- Go on a retreat, or spend time resting; meditating and journaling
- Seek support from people who see things the way you do

Basically, you need to know where to go for shelter and comfort when the storm comes.

STEP FOUR - RIDE THE WIND

Let go, relinquish control, and accept the results.

This is hard for guilty people, because they love approval, like to get things right, need to think of themselves as being good and being liked by others.

This need for control can come from our childhood. If those who were supposed to protect you and meet your needs didn't, your ability to trust others is compromised, and you may believe that you had better take care of yourself because you doubt that anyone else will.

This need is fear-based, and your sense of security may feel threatened if you let go.

It really is a question of feeling the fear and doing it anyway.

Letting go of what others think of you, of the need to rush in and rescue others are steps towards freedom. If this is difficult, you can put the process of letting go in the hands of God or the Universe (or whatever else you choose to substitute these words with).

Other things that can help are the power of discernment (this is also mentioned in my post on setting boundaries), and forgiveness – forgiving others and yourself.

*GOD, GIVE ME THE STRENGTH TO ACCEPT THE THINGS I CANNOT CHANGE,
COURAGE TO CHANGE THE THINGS I CAN,
AND WISDOM TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE*

STEP FIVE - PATROL YOUR BORDERS

If you're sensitive by nature, accept that this is a gift to share but also to protect. You must balance the need to take care of others and the need to take care of yourself.

It often takes perseverance to free yourself from toxic guilt, and it's easy to slip back into old habits. This is where the notion of patrolling borders comes in. This means looking out for old behaviour. When you realise that you're slipping back into your old ways, stop and ask yourself: Can I step into this situation, and maintain my emotional balance? If this is difficult, remind yourself that you need to do this in order to survive; otherwise, you will let guilt take over again.

Once you have found yourself again (and believe me, you will, even if it takes times), you need to make sure that you don't lose yourself again! To do this, simply list all the things you need to do to rediscover yourself and check them off as you go. They could be things like:

- Go out to dinner by yourself
- Go on a spiritual retreat
- Try a new hobby
- Get a massage
- Redecorate your home
- Reconnect with old friends
- Take a class in a subject you're fascinated by

Patrolling borders with our children often involves evaluating and moving the fences as age and situations change. This requires us to be aware of what's going on, to be able to talk to our children and to define the limits, for their sake and ours.

If you find any of this difficult, remember that taking good care of yourself is your primary goal. Nurture your spiritual life. Revisit the way things were before you decided to escape toxic guilt and see how different life is now. Journal the ways in which you feel better, freer, and healthier since removing toxic guilt. Talk to a mentor or close friend about any difficulties you may still be facing. Make sure you're eating and sleeping well. If in doubt, ask yourself what a trusted friend or person would do in the same situation. Take time out for yourself whenever necessary – you can't give from an empty cup!