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Dealing with Guilt in Caregiving

What working parent hasn't felt guilty on occasion? It's hard to leave a sick child with a baby sitter when you go to the office. And spending too much time handling family emergencies on the job can make you feel sheepish around your boss and coworkers.

Guilt is a feeling of not measuring up to your own expectations of yourself. Each one of us feels guilt in different degrees. Too much guilt is counterproductive because it creates stress and may prevent you from taking positive action.

When you feel overcome with guilt, ask yourself about the source of your expectations. Whose standards are you trying to meet? You may be placing impossible demands on yourself.

Here are some ideas and suggestions that can help you combat guilty feelings:

- How you relate to your children is more important than what you do for them. It's OK for them to bring store-bought brownies instead of homemade gingerbread cookies to the class holiday party.



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- If you must take care of a family emergency during work hours, don't apologize to your coworkers. Excessive apologies reinforce the idea that you're doing something wrong.
- Everyone defines "quality time" differently. Resist the urge to pack too many activities into a Saturday afternoon in order to make up for being at work all week. Use the time with your child to relax, talk or do household chores.
- Plan for unexpected family crises. Identify friends and family members who can help in an emergency. Keep a spare set of house keys with a neighbor.
- Be consistent about your expectations of your children. Don't let guilt interfere with discipline. All children need limits and boundaries in order to develop independence .
- If you must go to work when your child is sick, leave a photo of yourself or a tape recording of your voice. Ask the child's caregiver to reassure the child of your concern.
- Let go of guilt when you lose your temper or forget to kiss your children goodbye. Kids forget little mistakes. What's important is that you provide a consistent, warm and loving environment and that you're available to listen to your kids' feelings and concerns.
- Most parents' guilty feelings stem from a fear that their children may not turn out all right. If you feel guilty too often, get some perspective. Talk about your feelings with other parents and friends. You'll probably realize that your worries are unrealistic. When you can't shake lingering guilt, consider talking to a professional counselor.
- Avoid trying to buy your way out of your guilt by giving your children expensive gifts.
- Trust that you're doing the best you can with the demands placed on you and that your best is good enough.

How well do you manage stress?

Stress is what you experience internally in response to new or difficult situations. It's impossible to avoid stress entirely. But you can build up your resistance to the harmful effects of stress through a combination of exercise, good communication, time management and relaxation. This quiz will help you evaluate your ability to manage the unavoidable stressors in your life.



Always = 5 points

Usually = 3 points

Occasionally = 1 point

1. I exercise three times a week.
2. I eat a balanced diet that includes lots of fresh fruits and vegetables and whole-grain breads and cereals.
3. I share my feelings with a partner or friend on a regular basis.
4. I avoid perfectionism and set realistic goals for myself at home and at work.
5. I practice relaxation or meditation techniques each week.
6. I avoid alcohol and other drugs for dealing with pressure.



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7. I'm good at giving and receiving positive strokes.
8. I plan regular recreational activities that provide a complete change of scenery.
9. I avoid emotional "overload." I've learned to say "no" when I need to.
10. I feel satisfied with my work commitments and my employer's expectations of me.

If you scored:

- **10-23**, there are several important stress management skills that will help you. Start a regular exercise schedule if you don't already have one. Improve your communication skills and make more time for relaxation.
- **24-35**, you have a variety of ways to deal with stress. Take a look at those you need to improve and develop new strategies in these areas.
- **35 and above**, congratulations, you have some effective ways to deal with the complexities of life. Continue to develop and protect those skills.

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