**Goals and Objectives**

* To recognize how guilt feelings affect your health, and to learn healthier ways to respond
* To gain “tools” for coping to increase empowerment during recovery
  + To describe what “makes you feel guilty”
  + To discuss manipulation
  + To discuss irrational (unreasonable) beliefs involved in guilt
  + To list a way to improve a guilt feeling you have

**Negative Effects of Guilt**

* **If you let it**, guilt can “make you”:
  + Over-responsible, and over-worked
  + Over-conscientious or too careful
  + Over-sensitive, sad, tense, or anxious
  + Immobilized or “paralyzed”
  + Have more trouble making decisions
  + Take care of others first, instead of yourself (self-denial)
  + Ignore emotions and feelings that could be enjoyed

**Positive Effects of Guilt**

* Guilt is not always a bad thing – It is OK to feel guilt if you did something you shouldn’t have done
* It can help make moral decisions
* The discomfort of guilt can motivate people to change
* Coping techniques and therapy can help decrease guilt and negative thinking - It can also help control stress and tension in your life
* Guilt can lead you to recognize irrational beliefs that you were not aware of

**Some Irrational Beliefs**

* “No matter what I do, I am always wrong”
* “I am responsible to keep my family happy”
* “It’s my fault if they fail in any way”
* “There is only one right way to do things”
* “I have to do what people expect of me”
* “It’s wrong to be concerned about myself”
* “I should never feel guilty”
* “No one should feel hurt or pain.”
* “No one should die.”
* “I don’t deserve to be happy”

**Case Study**

* Dawn was a young woman whose friend recently died in a car accident. She was so sad and upset that she couldn’t face seeing other people, and didn’t go to work or school.
* She blamed herself for her friend’s death because Dawn had asked her get something at the store just before she was hit by the car.
* She told herself over and over, “If she didn’t go home from work that way, that car would never have hit her. It’s all my fault –It should have been me.”
* *Discussion: Is Dawn responsible for the accident? Why do you think she blames herself?*

**How People Increase Your Guilt**

* Giving you a sense of blame for past, present, or future actions by saying you were at fault (making up a story)
* Accusing you of being the one with a problem
* Encouraging negative thinking about yourself
* Limiting choices to those that result in some guilt
* Saying they will suffer if you don’t do what they want
* Faking problems, illness, unhappiness, or other negative behavior to add guilt (so you do more for them)
* Threatening things, like going to jail, hospital, failing, etc.

**Case Study**

* A young man named Jeff told his mother: “I lost my job today, and it’s all your fault. I didn’t like the sandwich you made, so I had to go out for lunch. I had a beer, and when I came back to work, they fired me. I don’t think you care about me at all. I feel like punching something.”
* Unhealthy Response
* Hismother said, “I’m sorry. I ran out of the sandwiches you like, but I’ll never do that again. I know that if you hadn’t left work, you wouldn’t have been tempted to drink.
* You mean everything to me. You can live here as long as you want to. I’ll help you find another job.”

**Healthy Response**

* His mother said, “If you are trying to make me feel guilty, it’s not working.
* Your problem was not because of the sandwich I made. You lost your job because you chose to drink alcohol.
* You know I love you, but you have to get serious about keeping a job. I can’t do it for you. You will need to live on your own someday.”

**Which of these issues occur with *unhealthy responses?***

* + Intimidation
  + Idealism
  + Need to fix
  + Caretaker behaviors
  + Letting go of the uncontrollables and unchangeables
  + Unconditional acceptance and love
  + Over-dependency
  + Manipulation
  + Developing self-control

**Recognize the True Problem**

* **Ask yourself:**
  + What is the problem?
  + Whose problem is it really?
  + Recognize your feelings of guilt.
  + Is my guilt making the problem look bigger than it is?
  + How would it look if I didn’t have the guilt?
  + Give the problem back, if it is someone else’s
* **Even if you feel some guilt, you don’t have to accept it** - You may have done nothing wrong

**Realize You Can’t Control Others**

* **Myth**: I should be in control of everything important in my life.
* **Reality**: You are powerless to control most people, places, and things in your life. You can only be fully in control of your own thoughts, emotions, and actions.
* Many people, places, and things in your life are uncontrollable and unchangeable
* Let Go of the Need To Control Others
* If you want to control, fix, change, rescue, enable, or correct others you may need the **LET GO** System:
  + **L Lighten Pressure** – Become more rational and realistic
  + **E Exercise Rights** – You have the right to say you can’t change or control other people
  + **T Take Steps** – Accept personal responsibility for your own life
  + **G Give Up Need** – Embrace meaning of the Serenity Prayer – Accept the things you cannot change
  + **Order Life** – Nurture healthy relationships and learn tools for coping

Messina, J. J. & Messina, C. (2010). From <http://www.jamesjmessina.com/seastoolsforrecovery/letgosystem.html>

**Use Self-Affirmations**

* I am a good person. I need only my own approval, admiration, and acceptance.
* I accept and love myself unconditionally - even when I make mistakes.
* I am a worthwhile person that deserves respect.
* I am improving my outlook as I recognize guilt and negative thinking
* Using my strengths and abilities, I will get what I need to succeed

*Discussion: Do you believe these statements?*

*How does it feel to say them aloud?*

**Avoid Being Manipulated**

* People may try to get what they want even when others are not willing to give it freely
* To “con” or get people to believe something that isn’t true
* Make others feel like they are responsible for their situation, so they don’t have to fix it themselves
* Manipulation is less likely if you have good self-esteem and you believe in yourself
* Manipulation happens easier if your feelings depend more on what other people think

**Use “I” Statements**

* Speaking for yourself is sometimes called using 'I' messages
* With "I" statements, people are less likely to be defensive, so you are more likely to be heard
* When using "I" statements, you talk about **your own** thoughts, feelings, and intentions
* “You" statements are not as healthy because they tend to label, blame, and defend, rather than communicate feelings
* With "you" statements, we seem to make the other person responsible for our feelings
* People tend to hear your opinions and judgment of them instead of listening to what your underlying feelings are

**Learning Activity: Using “I” Statements**

* + Each group member says to another person:
  + “I feel \_\_so angry!\_\_”, followed by “You make me feel\_\_so angry!\_\_
  + “I feel \_\_bad about it\_\_”, followed by “You make me feel\_\_bad about it\_\_
  + “I feel \_\_like I can’t do anything right\_\_”, followed by “You make me feel\_\_like I can’t do anything right\_\_
  + Compare how the “I” or “you” phrases change how you feel when you say it, or when you hear it said to you?

**Learn to Cope Better**

* Coping with stress, anxiety, and depression can help decrease feelings of guilt
* Recognize negative thinking and irrational thinking, then replace them with positive, realistic thinking
* Educate yourself and focus on problem solving
* Do activities you enjoy
* Take good care of yourself and your body
* Find supportive relationships and end toxic relationships

**Optional Discussion: What Are “Toxic” Relationships?**

* “I feel criticized, like whatever I do isn’t enough”
* “We argue about things that don’t even matter”
* “I feel guilty most of the time”
* “I’m afraid to ask for what I really want”
* “I feel negative or hopeless about myself and the relationship”
* “I put the needs of others ahead of my own too much - It is unhealthy for me”
* **“I know it is a toxic relationship. It will be hard, but I have to end it. Then I can recover from the guilt, depression and anxiety it causes.”**

References

Foster, A. & Roberts, V. Z. (Eds).(1998). *Managing mental health in the community: Chaos and containment.* Florence, KY, US: Taylor & Frances/Routledge.

Messina, J. J. (n.d.). Eliminating manipulation. Retrieved 9-8-09 from <http://www.livestrong.com/article/14680-eliminating-manipulation>

Messina, J. J. (n.d.). Handling guilt. Retrieved 9-8-09 from <http://www.livestrong.com/article/14689-handling-guilt>

Messina, J. J. & Messina, C. (2010). From <http://www.jamesjmessina.com/seastoolsforrecovery/letgosystem.html>