

Redwood Caregiver Resource Center
1140 Sonoma Ave., Ste. 1B
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
(707) 542-0282 or (800) 834-1636
Fax (707) 542-0552
Email: rcrc@redwoodcrc.org
Web: <http://redwoodcrc.org>
Serving: Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, Lake, Sonoma,
Napa & Solano Counties



Fact Sheet Survivor's Guilt

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, M.D & David Kessler

Survivor's guilt is what we may feel after a traumatic incident causing multiple deaths or even when one person in our life dies.

Not everyone will experience it. There is nothing abnormal about feeling it and there is nothing wrong if you don't feel any survivor's guilt.

It may happen when you find yourself in a situation where you think you should feel grateful and yet you don't.

Instead you feel guilty for living and conflicted when life goes on for you and not for other(s).

Opposite of a feeling of being the victim. It is not why me, it is, why not me? Why wasn't it me?

It is found in survivors of war, epidemics, the holocaust, disasters, rescue workers; spouses of loved ones who are ill.

You may feel like the wrong persons may have survived

It is important to remember you are in a situation where making sense out of who survived in usually impossible, there is no logic to be found because no logic exists.

You may feel like you didn't earn this, and maybe they did. You may think they deserved to live more than you. Comparisons are not realistic or helpful in these situations, no one deserves to die, especially not tragically.

In a situation like the recent terrorist, it is harder when we add the feeling of standing by helplessly. The truth was helpless, most of us did not have the power to stop it.

Feelings are very common and normal, they are part of the healing process, and we must search every corner of our psyche for reasons. We must each discover for ourselves that the events were senseless.

Talk about this with others. Don't feel guilty and be alone, don't add shame to this, others may also feel guilty.

Test out your logic with reality, ask friends. Ask them if they think you could have prevented something or changed it. Ask others and professions if you had any more power than you did to change events or outcomes.

We are all human and we are trying to make sense of one of the most senseless tragedies in history. Survivor's guilt is often part of this exploration.

Always, if you feel that your feelings are overwhelming or that you may harm yourself or others, seek professional help right away.