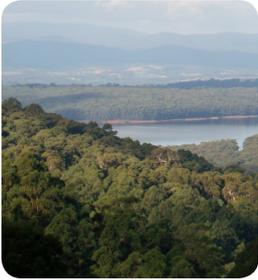## Effect of guilt on self esteem?

Guilt is an emotion, which serves absolutely no purpose, except in severe circumstances when it gives people an opportunity to have remorse for negative or hurtful behaviour.

Other than in extreme circumstances guilt just makes people feel bad and is often used as a way to feel punished, or even justify ones behaviour. For instance, when you eat something you know you shouldn't have eaten, you may experience instant guilt for a period of time after you have eaten the food. However, what purpose does this guilt serve? Does it make you stop eating the foods next time? No. It just makes you feel better for a while because you tell yourself that the guilt you are feeling is in fact the punishment for eating the foods you know you shouldn't have eaten. A much healthier and more productive alternative would be to use 'thought stopping', eat a healthy food to remove the craving, or distract yourself with physical activity.

Guilt often transcends into negative thoughts. For instance, if you decide to go shopping instead of doing a favour for someone, you have to live with that decision. There is no point feeling guilty when you're already shopping! You need to first consider whether you had a right to say "no". If you think it was OK to say "no", then just let the guilty feelings go. If you don't let these negative feelings go and you continue shopping, the guilt is not likely to make you go and help your friend (as you already know in your heart that you did the right thing), however, what you will probably do is start to tell yourself that you're not a good friend and start to feel depressed. You may even find a way to punish yourself (e.g. engaging in a behaviour that you know will make you feel bad, like eating a block of chocolate).

It's important to believe in yourself and your decisions to act in particular ways. You may upset people from time to time, but it's vital to be true to yourself, otherwise you'll feel guilty, unhappy and anxious throughout your life.

Unhealthy guilt can have a detrimental effect on your self-esteem and happiness. For instance, if you feel guilty every time you say "no" to someone, you will encourage negative emotions into your life.

Unhealthy guilt can result in the following:

- Anger and resentment when you allow guilt to stop you from taking part in activities that bring you happiness.
- Sickness when you allow guilt to turn into stress
- Self harm when you punish yourself for behaviours you deem negative (e.g. eating junk food)

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