



Moral Injury and Guilt

Moral injury is defined as the psychological distress that results from events that go against one's values and beliefs. In healthcare, we may experience moral distress when we are not able to deliver the best care we were trained to offer patients. Over time, repetitive moral distress may lead to moral injury. While moral injury is not a mental health diagnosis, it is something we want to pay attention to.

Some examples leading to moral injury include:

- When one believes they are doing the wrong thing and have little power to change the situation
- When care or services are being rationed
- When resources/supplies are being rationed

To read more about symptoms and how we can respond positively to morally injurious situations, [click here](#).

According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health¹, one of the most common responses felt by those experiencing moral injury is guilt. It may be helpful to replace common unhelpful thoughts with alternate helpful thoughts. The National Centre for PTSD suggests the following²:

TOPIC: GUILT

Common Unhelpful Thoughts	How You May Feel	Alternate Helpful Thoughts	How You'll Feel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm a bad person for letting this happen. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • guilty • worthless • like you hate yourself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A bad person wouldn't feel guilty about this. • The reason I feel bad is because I care. • I did the best I could with the information I had at the time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • like you aren't to blame • worthy • self-accepting

TOPIC: GUILT

Common Unhelpful Thoughts	How You May Feel	Alternate Helpful Thoughts	How You'll Feel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I should have prevented this. • I should have done something differently. • I am disappointed in myself. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • guilty • worthless or blaming • frustrated • upset 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We all make mistakes. I can forgive myself and learn from what happened. • I can use this time to strengthen my faith / values / practice. • Nobody could have prevented this. • I can't always protect myself or others. • There was limited information about how to prevent this at the time it happened. • I had to make difficult decisions and didn't realize the extent of danger at the time. • I had few options at the time. • I did the best I could given that: I was exhausted; I was dealing with a lot; I was operating with limited resources; I was pressed for time, etc. • There are many things I'm grateful for, so I'll focus on those instead of what is bothering me. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-accepting • worthy • like you aren't to blame

¹ <https://www.camh.ca/en/camh-news-and-stories/moral-injury>

² https://www.ptsd.va.gov/covid/COVID_helpful_thinking.asp

Something to Do

[Self-forgiveness Meditation, by Jack Kornfield](#)

Something to Read

[Forgiving Self and Others with God's Help](#)

(note: Christian bias)

If you think you are experiencing moral injury, reach out for help. Don't suffer alone. You'll find many helpful resources on the Shared Health Mental Health Resource Finder webpage.

<https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/providers/mental-health-resources/>