

Mommy Guilt – by Shawna Toth

Guilt: The state of one who has committed an offense especially consciously OR Feelings of culpability especially for imagined offenses or from a sense of inadequacy.

Mommy Guilt: A Mother's state of mind about doing anything that does not directly and immediately benefit their children.

Recently, a Mom friend of mine confided that when she had her first child, she did not feel any guilt...until one day another Mom asked her if she felt guilty for doing something for herself. "I do now." Another Mom friend of mine told us that she felt guilty laying her baby down for a nap, because then she would be getting a break. I am sure she used that time to slovenly wash dishes or fold laundry or, god forbid, shower. No wonder she felt guilty. Seriously, even if what she did was go directly to her bed and lay there still and silent until her child awoke, should she not be able to do so guilt free? Don't we, as Moms, deserve a break?

These conversations got me thinking about the Mommy Guilt that we all seem to accept as inevitable. Do I feel Mommy Guilt? You bet I do. There are, of course, the big ones. When our twin sons were 4 months old, I went back to work. At the time I did not feel guilty, because I was pretty sure they were better off in the caring hands of professionals, but a year or two later, guilt set in that I still grapple with occasionally, even though I know I made the best choice for our family at the time.

There are those daily sources of guilt, as well. The other day I carefully planned to get groceries while my husband was having dinner with the boys. He had been out of town, and they needed some Daddy time. Then, while at the grocery store, I ran into a Mom I know who was shopping with her 2 children. And she actually commented on how nice it must be for me to be shopping alone. Well, it was nice until I ran into her.

Felt a twinge of the Mommy Guilt the first couple of days I dropped my almost 3 year old off at pre-school and then did whatever I wanted for three hours. I signed him up for pre-school because I felt guilty for not socializing him more. I feel it when I work on the computer while my kids play elsewhere (or right beside me) in the house. I feel it when I get a babysitter so I can get some work done. I feel it if I am super-grumpy with them because I haven't had any adult interaction for a while. And, I feel it when I leave them at home so I can meet my girlfriends for dinner.

See how ridiculous it is? Mommy Guilt is no win. What is the source of all this self-judgement?

I think it boils down to three inter-related situations. First, we have a ton of information about what is best for our kids. If you tried to do it all, you would kill yourself in a week. So, we pick and choose, and then wonder if we've made the right choices. Secondly, because we are constantly making these almost impossible choices, we are second guessing ourselves and feeling bad for not being able to do it all. And third, in an effort to alleviate some of our own guilt, we justify our own choices, sometimes out loud, sometimes to other Moms, (sometimes in the grocery store) and in the process, maybe make them feel

guilty if they have made a different choice. (Note: I don't feel that most of us do this to each other on purpose or with any negative intention.)

Okay ladies. Down with Mommy Guilt! How are we going to reverse this trend? I have a couple of suggestions. Let's start by listening to the experts who say that you will be a better Mom if you take care of yourself. That means that if you get enough sleep (ha ha ha ha), take time to eat a proper meal, do some things you like to do and give yourself a break occasionally, you might not lose it every time your 9 year old refuses to turn off the Wii at dinner time. (Or some other totally generic, impersonal example.) Next, you will have to completely ignore what other Moms are doing. Well, that's not really true. Other Moms can be a great source of information and support. What is tricky is listening to their ideas and choices, and not feeling like you have to defend your own. Every family is different. What works for them may not work for you.

Ultimately, the best way to minimize Mommy Guilt, in my opinion, is to try to accept the choices we all make as Mothers, our own and everyone else's, and to support each other in those decisions. Tell the Moms you know what a great job they are doing, that you know it's hard, and that they deserve a break, guilt free. Hopefully, they will do the same for you.