



SURVIVOR'S GUILT

Presented by Military and Family Life Counselors

OBJECTIVES

Participants will be able to:

- Recognize the symptoms of survivor's guilt
- Gain an understanding of guilt
- Learn coping methods for dealing with survivor's guilt



AGENDA

- What is survivor's guilt?
- When does survivor's guilt occur ?
- Symptoms of survivor's guilt
- Understanding the effects of guilt
- How to cope with survivor's guilt
- Children and survivor's guilt
- In conclusion



WHAT IS SURVIVOR'S GUILT?

- A deep feeling of guilt often experienced by those who have survived some catastrophe that took the lives of many others
- A normal response to an abnormal situation
- Can derive partly from a feeling that one did not do enough to save others who perished or who were injured



WHEN DOES SURVIVOR'S GUILT OCCUR?

- When there is a **national disaster**, like war, 9/11, school or workplace shootings, bridge collapses, airplane crashes
- When there are **natural disasters**, like Katrina, tornadoes and hurricanes, floods, fires, earthquakes
- It can also occur in non life threatening situations such as when coworkers are laid off from their jobs and you “survive” the layoffs
- People can experience survivor's guilt even though they were nowhere near the disaster zone and didn't lose a loved one



SYMPTOMS OF SURVIVOR'S GUILT

Some common symptoms include:

- Intrusive thoughts
- Nightmares
- Sleep disturbance
- Change in appetite
- Loss of motivation
- Feeling immobilized



SYMPTOMS OF SURVIVOR'S GUILT

CONTINUED

- Obsessing about the event
- Sadness
- Anxious feelings
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Loss of self-confidence and self-esteem



UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECTS OF GUILT

Guilt can:

- Intensify trauma and grief
- Prolong the grief process
- Immobilize a person mentally, emotionally and physically
- Hinder well-being, productive action and positive relationships
- Keep the guilt ridden person “stuck”



HOW TO COPE WITH SURVIVOR'S GUILT

- Acknowledge your grief and guilt
- Realize your feelings of guilt are normal and common under the circumstances
- Seek support and talk to others about your experience and the feelings you have
- Take this as an opportunity to reevaluate your life and make positive changes
- Realize it's ok to let yourself be happy and thankful you survived



HOW TO COPE WITH SURVIVOR'S GUILT

CONTINUED

- Get involved with helping others
- Practice self care
- Allow yourself to grieve the loss
- Recognize this as an opportunity to honor the deceased



CHILDREN AND SURVIVOR'S GUILT



Children and adolescents can also experience survivor's guilt for many of the same reasons that adults do

- Feelings they should have done more to help
- Feelings they should have been there if they weren't



HELPING CHILDREN RECOVER

Ways to help children recover:

- Help them identify and express feelings
- Encourage them to tell their story
- Give them lots of love and affection
- Answer their questions as honestly as possible
- Help them find ways to honor those who died



IN CONCLUSION

- Most with survivor's guilt recover with help from family, friends and community
- If the suggestions for coping do not help and symptoms worsen and begin interfering with the ability to function, don't be afraid to seek help from a chaplain or local clergy, military community services or behavioral health services.



SUMMARY

- Survivor's guilt is a common response and a normal response to an abnormal occurrence
- Survivor's guilt can occur when there is a natural or national disaster
- Guilt can cause someone to become immobilized
- It's important to seek support from others
- Helping others can help to alleviate guilt
- If symptoms of survivor's guilt begin to interfere with functioning, don't be afraid to seek help.





QUESTIONS?



RESOURCES

- Military Community Services
- Chaplain and Local Clergy
- Military OneSource (800) 342-9647
- TRICARE www.Tricare.mil
- Behavioral Health Services



REFERENCES

- *Survivor's Guilt*, Dawn Turpin, Vancouver Island, BC
- *How to Carry on After loss – The Guilt of the Survivor*, Karen Flood, PhD, RCC, Patient and Family Counseling, VCC, BCCA
- *Guilt Following Trauma*, Kathleen Nader, DSW, Mental Health Matters, Mission Hospital, Mission Viejo, CA





THANK YOU

