

Mom Guilt



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With Your Host

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Hi there. Welcome to the *Design Your Dream Life* podcast. My name is Natalie Bacon, and I'm an advanced certified mindfulness life coach as well as a wife and mom. If you're here to do the inner work and grow, I can help. Let's get started.

Hello my friend. Welcome to the podcast. I'm on fire today. I'll tell you what. If you do not have a source of positive input that can help you manage your mind, I don't know how you do it. My brain is a hot mess when I do not manage it. Everything in my life gets so much better when I do.

So that leads perfectly into this workshop that I am hosting called How to Stop Feeling Like You're Failing As A Mom. I don't know about you, but for myself personally and for so many of the women who talk to me in this community, whether it's on Instagram, whether it's through email, whether it's inside Grow You. I am noticing this theme where we're feeling like we're really failing even when we are doing our best. And obviously, especially when we are making mistakes. I think that the worst part of it is the guilt that we feel.

So I am going to teach you how to solve this specific problem using the tools that I teach here on the podcast. You will learn how to use mindset and body work to create this new perspective on how you are performing as a mom and what to do when you feel like you are failing. My hope is that you find this new peace of mind that no matter what's happening with your kids, no matter what's happening inside your home, you have this sense that it's all okay. You have this peacefulness within you. You have this acceptance of yourself. You no longer feel like you are failing as a mom.

This workshop is \$19. It is a one-time class I am offering. It is on July 19th. So about two weeks away from the time that this is airing. You can get all of the information over at nataliebacon.com/workshop. There will be a replay and all of the other details on that page. Again, nataliebacon.com/workshop. We're really excited to dive into this work with you. It's been so helpful for me. My hope is it's just as helpful for you as well.

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Which leads us really nicely into today's topic, which is mom guilt. This has been such a highly requested topic. So I'm so happy to bring it here to you today. I like to start off with definitions of terms because I think it is really helpful to get specific with what we're even talking about. So I have a few definitions for you that I found online. I think they'll probably really resonate so we can all get on the same page with what we're even talking about.

So mom guilt, also known as mommy guilt, is a phrase that we use to describe feeling guilty in relation to your kids. Guilt specifically is a feeling that comes from your thinking that you have done something wrong. Sometimes guilt can be useful, I think, depending on why you're feeling guilty, what you're thinking.

So, for example, let's say that you snap at your husband, and you call him a mean name. You decide that you were rude and you feel a little bit of guilt afterwards. This can be useful because it helps you hold yourself accountable. But this is very different than what we do as moms with respect to mom guilt.

We don't just have guilt in response to thinking thoughts like oh I made a mistake, and I don't want to do that again, and I feel a little bad about it. Instead if we make a mistake in parenting, not only do we think yeah I feel kind of bad about this and I don't want to do it again. We also then take it a step further and make it mean something about who we are as moms. That shifts it from guilt to shame. Guilt is I did something bad. Shame is I am bad.

So I think in motherhood this is just pervasive. We take this feeling of guilt that we're creating from our thoughts, and we make it mean that we are bad. We take on this identity that we are not good enough. I think it comes from this idea that we want to be good moms, which sounds like an amazing thought. Held out on its own, it is.

But when we apply it to ourselves and we make it this unrealistic ideal of a perfect mom, I often refer to this as a robot mom. A mom who is not human because she never makes mistakes. Then it's not useful at all. Then there's

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no room for humaneness. There's no room for growth. Instead, what it becomes is holding ourselves accountable to an unachievable, unobtainable standard that we really just use to beat ourselves up, to think that we are not good enough, that our kids deserve better.

Instead of helping us do better the next time, we actually find ourselves living in this perfectionist world where we're never enjoying motherhood. We're never showing up as our best selves because we don't even think we are worthy of that.

I found that when I was looking up mom guilt, it was really interesting because it doesn't just come up when we make mistakes. It comes up also when we don't even want to be feeling guilt, when we didn't even do something wrong.

So, for example, let's say that you decide to take time for yourself. Oftentimes, if you're anything like me or any of my clients, you will feel on default guilty. The reason is not because you made a mistake, and you want to do something differently next time.

It's because you have this idea in your mind that to be a good enough mom, you need to devote 100% of your time and energy to your kids. Which, again, is impossible because as a human being, let alone as a wife, mom, sister, friend, neighbor, all the other roles that you play. Just as a human you have needs. What I find so fascinating is that we've taken on this emotion of I did something wrong and I want to feel bad about it to this place where we're not even doing anything wrong, but we're just feeling bad for doing anything outside of the motherhood role.

So I want to go over a few areas with you, I've already touched on two, and I'll make them a little bit clearer here for you, where I find that mom guilt comes up the most. So one is with mistakes. So let's say that you are working on yelling at your kids less. You want to become a mom who doesn't yell at your kids. You find that anytime you yell at your kids, you feel mom guilt. It's because you're telling yourself good moms don't yell at their kids. This is a mistake. I kind of want to feel bad about it.

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So mistakes is one category where I see mom guilt come up a lot. I think we can all kind of understand that because we might feel guilt in relation to mistakes that we make outside of the role of motherhood. Like I said, if you are rude to your spouse or you say something that later on you realize was a little bit not nice or unkind. We can understand feeling a little bit of guilt in every role that we have. So mistakes is one area where mom guilt comes up. That sort of logically makes sense, I think.

Another way that mom guilt comes up that I've already touched on but I want to articulate it here specifically is roles. So we have so many different roles that we play in our lives. One is mom, another is spouse if you're married, or partner or wife. Another is sister if you are a sister or friend or daughter or employee or business owner or neighbor. We have all of these different roles. Then, of course, human being being kind of the main role that we play. Our ego attaches to all of those other roles. We have responsibilities and desires for each role.

Oftentimes we have to make a choice, which is the other category that I want you to think about for mom guilt. So we have mistakes. We have roles. We have choices. So when it comes to making a choice between how you're going to spend your time, money, energy within a specific role, if ever you are to choose a role outside of motherhood, we make that mean, again, that we are bad moms.

So let's say very practically, you have an opportunity to go on a girls trip with your friends. You haven't been on a girls trip in a year, and you decide very logically from your prefrontal cortex that yeah this is something you want to do. So you plan the trip. You are getting ready to leave, and you feel enormous mom guilt. It's coming from not you going on the trip, but this subconscious belief that you are supposed to dedicate yourself as a human being to 100% of the time playing the role of mom. That there is no space for other roles.

So what you want to do is catch yourself. Oh, this is me thinking that choosing to do something in the role as friend is bad. But that's not true,

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right? Like once you're aware of what's actually happening, you can talk back to your brain.

I can relate to this personally. I'm going to one of my girlfriend's baby showers out of state here shortly. I was thinking about mom guilt and how I feel a little bit of mom guilt, but not a lot. Then I really thought it through and I thought okay, I want to be a person who has friendships and who is a good friend.

To do that, that means that I want to spend some of my time, money, and energy in that role. That means that sometimes I'll be spending time, money, and energy in the role of friend that I won't be spending as mom. So I don't need to be there 24/7 365 as mom. Sometimes I'm going to be playing other roles. That's not doing something wrong. In fact, that's doing something right on purpose.

So I have to recondition my brain to see that oh yeah, this is me making a choice to prioritize another role, and I want to do that. First of all, I want to do it just because it makes me more of who I want to be. I want to have friendships. I want to be a good friend. I want to do other things. But also it has this secondary side effect that it does show my family that mom is a human with other roles, and that that's a good thing. Okay.

So, again, circling back to where mom guilt comes up. It comes up when we make mistakes. It comes up when we have choices to make and balancing choices, specifically when it comes to multiple roles that we play.

Another place that I find that this comes up is with regret. So one of my clients wrote in and said, "I wish I did it differently with my adult kids when they were young." Again, I think this goes back to this idea that there is some right way to be a perfect mom. So there's a right way to be a mom, and that right way is to be perfect. The way that I did it in the past was definitely wrong.

Notice the difference here between what I just described, and I'm a mom who's a human being who makes mistakes. Of course, when we logically

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separate it out like this, it makes sense. Of course, moms are human beings who make mistakes. I think in general we can all agree with that. But when we go into our daily lives and we think about the actual mistakes that we're making, we make it mean so much about ourselves. The same is true with my client who was thinking about the mistakes that she made or how she did things when her kids were younger.

I have to tell you there is no upside to thinking about it this way. All it does is erode the relationship that we have with ourselves. All it does is make us feel shame. So that's when that mom guilt that oh, I did something bad I want to do it differently next time goes into mom shame.

So I think what's been helpful for me, and I'm hoping just all of this is helpful for you. It's been really helpful for me, but also what has been helpful has been noticing the tension. The tension in the decisions that I want to make. I want to have a full life. I want to wear many hats. I want to have lots of roles. I want to notice my humaneness. I want to kind of get rid of this idea that there's this perfect robot mom. In so doing, there's going to be some tension.

When your child is sad and doesn't want you to leave and you immediately feel mom guilt, that's the automatic response. What I want you to notice is simply that it's coming from your thinking. You are thinking that you're doing something wrong.

So what you can do there is notice and tell yourself okay what's actually happening here? I'm not doing something wrong. There's just a tension. I love my child so much. I want to be a good mom, and I want to raise good kids. There's not a right way to do that. Also, I want to leave and go to dinner with my friends. That might mean my child who's really attached during this phase of life is really sad. That doesn't mean that I'm doing anything wrong.

I think too what comes into play a lot is how on default, we mirror our kids emotions so much. Meaning if child is sad, we're sad. I think this is just almost biological until you can notice it and really change it. You can be

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compassionate while your child is sad instead of being sad. This is work that I've done on myself, which has just been so powerful. So, so, so very powerful.

So lastly, I want to go through examples that were submitted. So I asked you all on Instagram when was the last time that you felt mom guilt and why. I think it'd be powerful to go through some of these examples because some of them are a little bit different. We already touched on one, which was wishing I had done things differently with my adult kids. Then yelling at my kids, we already went through that as well. So let's go through a few more so you can see how you would apply these tools to experiencing mom guilt in your real life.

Okay the first one was letting kids on electronics longer than I planned so I could do a task. So this is not hard to imagine. You're letting your kids have more screen time, more than you had planned, so that you could do a task. So as soon as you feel the mom guilt, you want to notice it as a feeling and then ask yourself where the tension is.

So, of course, this was just in a quick question box on Instagram. I don't have all the information about what the task was for. But I could guess that it was either for the home or for work. Let's just go with those. So if it was for either, it's I'm choosing to act in a different role. I'm choosing to prioritize my role as CEO of the home, of homemaker, of house manager. Or I'm choosing to prioritize my role as employee or boss or business owner instead of prioritizing my role as mom in this moment.

When I articulate it in this way of I'm making a choice to put on my hat as a business owner, as employee, or as house manager, it relieves some of the guilt because I then bring attention to my brain that oh yeah, I want to have other hats. I want to wear other hats. I'm a human being of course. Of course, I wear other hats besides the mom hat. So it decreases some of the guilt when I see that it's just a choice I'm making to prioritize which role in that moment at that time.

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The next example that came in was that the dad was gone for work. When he got back into town, the mom, the woman who wrote in, wanted alone time, but she had this thought that she should be prioritizing family time. We should be spending time together as a family now. So she felt mom guilt for wanting that time alone.

Again, here, I think that noticing you have many roles and many hats. If you're used to parenting together with your spouse who's the dad of your children, and he's out of town. You then put on the mom hat, and you're doing all of the parenting instead of splitting it with another person. When dad gets back into town, of course you're going to want some alone time. Why? Because you have the role as human being where you need to rest and relax and recharge, right? You are not a robot mom who can just go, go, go without resting and relaxing and recharging your body.

So, if you're feeling mom guilt because you want some space, just know that it's because you have another role outside of mom. That role is human. As a human, you actually do need space for yourself. That doesn't mean anything about you as a mom. Meaning there's no reason to feel bad. You didn't make a mistake that you want to feel guilty about and you certainly don't want to make it mean that you're a bad mom, which goes into that mom shame.

There were several entries that came in about spending an evening away, spending a weekend away, just basically spending any time away from the kids, and leaving the kids with someone else like a babysitter or grandparent or just anyone else other than you as the parent. I think, again, what you want to do here is notice where the tension is. The tension is between the roles.

If the idea is that as a mom I'm supposed to have my mom hat on and be a 24/7 365 mom where I don't have any space for being in any other role, then, of course, I'm going to feel guilty because I'm going to fall short of that. Because first of all, I'm a human, but also I want to have friends. I want to be in those other roles.

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So just bring attention to the fact that when you spend time away from your kids, whether it's going out to dinner with girlfriends, whether it's going on a trip with your spouse or with friends, whatever it is that you're doing away from your child, that is an intentional choice that you're making. It's a choice that you want to be making. It's not something that you want to be mad about, upset about, feel bad about.

This also ties into how your kids are feeling. So if your kids are feeling sad and they don't want you to go, give them space. Allow them to feel sad and tell them very directly Mommy has friends outside of the home, and I want to spend time with those friends, right? The way that you articulate this is going to vary greatly by age. Is it a three year old or is it a 13 year old?

But the idea is to be really direct about it so that we're not sort of tiptoeing around what's happening and kind of making the mom guilt something we're hiding. Instead, it's allowing the child space to feel sad. I know you feel sad. I know you want Mommy to be with you all of the time. I love you. I love being a mom. I also love spending time with my friends sometimes too. They may still be sad, and that's okay.

You might not want to be thrilled that they're sad, but you don't have to feel mom guilt. You don't have to make it mean that you are a bad mom, right? You are a mom with a prefrontal cortex that is very developed, and you have different roles that you're in and you want to make choices about those roles. That's a really good thing. Whereas your three year old's, prefrontal cortex is not developed enough to be able to see that and understand that. That's okay.

So we can love them and give them compassion, and you can still decide to put on that hat of friend and go out and then come back. You just want to remind yourself of the truth. My child is sad. They're allowed to be sad. I can honor and validate their sadness. And that has nothing to do with me as a mom. What's happening here is that I'm making a choice to put on my friend hat and give some time and energy and money to that role. I'll come back and put my hat on as mom. So the work here is reminding yourself that what you're doing is what you want to be doing.

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There were a few examples that came into my DMs about mom guilt that we're all different, but the cause of the mom guilt was I should be perfect and should not be a human being, and therefore I should be a robot mom. So the examples were, we had a living room camp out with my son, and I was bored. The other one was I'm not spending three to four hours playing with my little one every day. The other one was my son had croup six times in less than a year. All of these moms said I feel so guilty for it. Again, we want to go through it.

This one isn't about a roll. This one isn't about a mistake. This one is just the ideal here that there is some perfect mom. The perfect mom doesn't get bored. The perfect mom doesn't have a kid who gets sick six times a year. The perfect mom spends at least three to four hours playing with her little one every day. Those thoughts are so toxic. They seem so lovely, but it makes you a robot.

I think, for me, just reminding myself I am human I am not a robot mom helps so much decrease the mom guilt. Just reminds me okay, the mom guilt is just this primitive, automatic response that is optional. I know moms with so how many kids who don't experience mom guilt. I just want you to know that ahead of time because I want you to know that it is possible to not experience mom guilt or at least to decrease it significantly.

One of my girlfriends was saying to me I think you just always are going to feel mom guilt. It was one of those moments where, of course, it's easier to just agree. But I really said you know, I don't think so. I think that there is a better way. I want us all to know this better way because mom guilt turns into mom shame. Then we don't show up as our best. We don't enjoy motherhood. We think that we're always doing it wrong.

So the biggest takeaway that I want you to have here is that mom guilt is optional. If you are in the habit of experiencing a lot of mom guilt, it's just because you have made that thought pattern a habit. That there is a right way, and anything short of that right way means you're not doing a good job. Means that you are not good enough.

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There's no room for mistakes. There's no room for choices. There's no room for other roles. There's no room for anything other than perfection. Which, of course, when we say out loud doesn't make sense, but that is exactly what's happening on a subconscious level when we go around thinking I just want to be a good mom.

So that's why I talk a lot about wanting to be the world's okayest mom. It's not because I don't want to try. It's because I want to try, but when I fall short I don't want to make it mean that something is wrong with me. I want to make it mean that I'm a human doing my best and sometimes my best is really bad. I love me and I love you and I love being a mom.

So hopefully this message was helpful for you. There's so much to unpack because we have sort of normalized mom guilt as this way of being with respect to so many different areas. Hopefully, I touched on many of those areas for you.

We are going to be diving into this so much more inside Grow You, and I'm going to be helping you specifically with it at that workshop that is coming up. So hopefully I will see you there. I would love to hear about how you're experiencing mom guilt and give you some specific steps that you can get started with. All right my friend, I will talk to you next time. Take care.

If you loved this podcast I invite you to check out Grow You my mindfulness community for moms where we do the inner work together. Head on over to nataliebacon.com/coaching to learn more.