



COVID Guilt and Other Vexing Emotions

INTRODUCING
SUPEREGOMAN!
 ABLE TO LEAP TALL BUILDINGS
 BECAUSE HE SHOULD, BECAUSE IT'S
 THE RIGHT THING TO DO, AND
 BECAUSE HE WOULD FEEL GUILTY IF HE DIDN'T.



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It's February. It's month eleven of the shutdown. It's time to check in with your self talk. What vexing thoughts are rolling around in your head?

- I'm just not doing this COVID thing well.
- I'm no good at Zoom.
- I don't have any energy.
- My teaching sucks.
- My parenting sucks.
- I should be creating some sort of artistic masterpiece.
- I should be fighting for social justice.
- I should be able to leap tall buildings in one jump!

Right?

Guilt shows up daily in lots of little ways and it is exhausting. Especially if we think we should be some kind of superhero and rise above all the challenges of COVID with brilliance, creativity, and accolades. This is true whether you are a paraeducator, teacher, counselor, administrator, or other school employee. We've been dealing with this stressful situation for almost a year now and we're all experiencing tremendous fatigue.

"My mind is a neighborhood I try not to go into alone."

Anne Lamott

We are hearing from teachers—especially successful, seasoned, long-term teachers—who say they don't recognize themselves. Everything they are good at in the classroom is really hard to do over Zoom. They're feeling shame, guilt, and embarrassment. They believe they should be doing this better, and some fear that someone might find out they're not. Then the "shoulds" start adding up. I should be more creative. I should take better care of my students. I should, I should, I SHOULD . . .

"Stop shoulding on yourself!"

This isn't ordinary guilt. It's COVID guilt and it's different from ordinary guilt because there is a warped sense about it. The ground has shifted under our feet. The rules of this situation aren't normal. We are thrown off balance by a sense of disorientation and a lack of confidence in our ability to manage it.

Comparison Trap

Everyone knows comparison is a trap, but in this isolation and physical distance from colleagues, it's simply hard to know how you are doing and if you are measuring up. Especially when you really don't know how anyone else is actually doing. It's easy to fall into warped thinking that everyone else must be handling all of this better than you are. This is also COVID guilt. There is also a danger of comparing yourself to the kind of teacher, counselor, or administrator you were pre-COVID—when you were really good at your game. But that's apples vs. oranges now! Being an educator during COVID is not the same as it was pre-COVID.

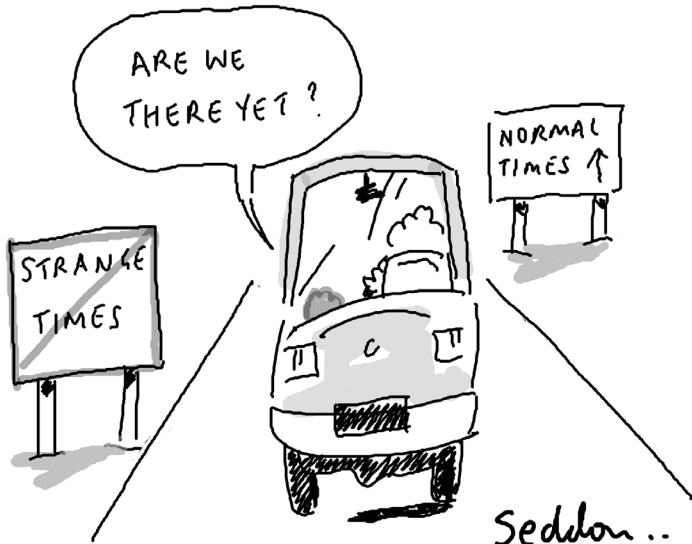
Grief and Loss

Underneath COVID guilt is a deep sense of grief and loss. You may have lost your professional self-definition. You may be experiencing a lack of connection with students and colleagues. Regular routines and practices went out the window months ago. Nothing feels familiar and predictable. These are significant losses. Name the emotion what it is: grief.

Self-esteem and Self-worth

This stressful time is going to pass—the end is in sight and school will be conducted once again in well-loved, familiar spaces sometime this year. But the past eleven months have taken a toll on our emotional sense of self and our confidence. Everyone's experiences and challenges have been different and the road back will be different, too. Recovering from these struggles and challenges you've endured will take some work.

Make space for self-compassion, forgiveness, deep conversation, laughter, and therapy as needed. Acknowledge that you've done your best in very difficult circumstances. Bless and release. (See previous article.)



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