

# GUILT FREE

## GROUPS

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### Your Complete Host Guide

Everything you need to start a Guilt Free discussion group  
with the women in your life

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*Based on Guilt Free: Reclaiming Your Life from Unreasonable Expectations*

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# Welcome, Group Host!

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Thank you for starting a Guilt Free Group! By gathering women together to explore the ideas in this book, you are doing something powerful. You are creating a space where women can speak honestly about guilt, challenge the expectations that weigh them down, and support each other in living with more freedom and intention.

You do not need to be a therapist, a teacher, or an expert. You just need to be willing to hold space, ask good questions, and listen. This guide will walk you through everything else.

*The book started the conversation. Your group deepens it with other women who are also ready to reclaim their lives.*

## What Is a Guilt Free Group?

A Guilt Free Group is a gathering of women — in person or virtually — who read and discuss *Guilt Free: Reclaiming Your Life from Unreasonable Expectations* together. Over the course of six meetings, your group will explore the book's core ideas: the Guilt Equation, the Four Furies of expectations, why guilt feels so sticky, and what it takes to make real change.

This is not therapy. This is not a class. This is a group: a place where every voice matters, where personal stories are honored, and where the collective wisdom of women who understand each other becomes the most powerful tool in the room.

# How It Works

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## The Basics

**Group size:** Varies. Ideally large enough for diverse perspectives.

**Meeting frequency:** Every 2 weeks is ideal (gives time to read and reflect). Weekly or monthly also works.

**Meeting length:** 60 minutes per session (or whatever works best for you).

**Format:** In person (living rooms, coffee shops, libraries) or virtual (Zoom, FaceTime, Google Meet).

**Total sessions:** 6 sessions covering the full book, plus an optional opening gathering.

## Suggested Reading Schedule

Session	Focus	Reading
Opening	Getting to Know Each Other & Our Guilt	None. Come as you are.
Session 1	Introduction, the Guilt Equation & Socialization	Introduction + Chapters 1 & 2
Session 2	The Four Furies of Expectations	Chapter 3
Session 3	Why Guilt is So Sticky	Chapter 4
Session 4	Quieting Guilty Thoughts & The SPEAK Method	Chapters 5 & 6
Session 5	Changes in our Relationships	Chapter 7
Session 6	Final Thoughts & Looking Forward	Conclusion

### ☒ Host Tip

This schedule is a suggestion, not a rule. Some groups may want to spend two sessions on the Four Furies. Others may combine sessions. Follow the energy and needs of your group. The goal is depth, not speed.

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# Your Hosting Toolkit

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## Setting the Tone

The most important thing you do as a host is create an atmosphere where women feel safe to be honest. Here are some principles that help:

**Confidentiality first.** What is shared in the group stays in the group. Establish this in your very first meeting and revisit it often.

**No advice unless invited.** This is a space for sharing and reflecting, not fixing. Encourage women to listen and share their own experiences rather than offering solutions.

**All feelings are welcome.** Some sessions will be light. Some will be emotional. Both are valuable. If someone tears up, let there be space for that.

**Every voice matters.** Gently draw in quieter members with open invitations like, “Would anyone who hasn’t shared yet like to add anything?”

**Honor the clock.** Start and end on time. Women’s time is precious, and respecting it is an act of care.

## Group Agreements

At your first meeting, invite the group to agree on shared commitments. Here is a starting template you can customize:

### Our Group Agreements

1. What is shared here stays here.
2. We listen to understand, not to fix.
3. We speak from our own experience, using “I” rather than “you should.”
4. We welcome all emotions: tears, laughter, and everything in between.
5. We honor each other’s time by starting and ending as planned.
6. We remember that this is a group, not therapy, and we encourage anyone who needs additional support to seek it.
7. We give each other grace. Imperfect attendance and imperfect participation are perfectly welcome.

*Anything you’d like to add? (It’s great to review these with the group)*

## Suggested Meeting Flow

Here is a template you can follow for each session. Adjust timing to fit your group.

Time	Activity	Description
0–10 min	Arrival & Check-In	A simple round: “One word for how you’re arriving tonight.” Or a brief opening question.
10–15 min	Session Framing	Host shares a brief summary or key quote from the assigned reading to ground the conversation.
15–45 min	Discussion	Use 3–4 discussion questions from this guide. Let conversation flow naturally. Redirect gently if needed.
45–55 min	Closing Round	Each person shares one takeaway, one intention, or one word for how they’re leaving.
55–60 min	Logistics & Preview	Confirm next meeting date and reading assignment. Share any housekeeping.

# Opening Gathering

*Getting to Know Each Other & Our Guilt*

*No reading required. Come as you are. (This can also be combined with Session 1.)*

This first meeting is about building connection and trust before diving into the book. The goal is for every woman in the room to feel seen, heard, and excited about the journey ahead.

## Icebreaker

Go around the group and share: your name, what drew you to this book or this group, and one thing you're hoping to get out of this experience.

## Discussion

### Question 1

**What comes to mind when you hear the word “guilt”?**

- *Is it a feeling you experience often? Rarely?*
- *Is it something you associate with a specific part of your life?*

### Question 2

**When was the last time you felt guilty about something? What was the expectation underneath that guilt?**

- *Was the expectation yours, or did it come from somewhere else?*
- *Looking back, was the guilt proportional to what actually happened?*

### Question 3

**Do you think guilt affects women differently than men? Why or why not?**

- *Think about the women in your life: your mother, sisters, friends, colleagues.*
- *Do you see patterns in what women feel guilty about?*

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☒ **Personal Reflection**

Complete this sentence: "If I could release one source of guilt from my life, it would be \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_."

# Session 1: Understanding the Guilt Equation

Reading: Introduction + Chapter 1: Understanding Guilt and Chapter 2: Why Do Women Experience So Much Guilt?

This session introduces the book's foundational framework:

## **Guilt = Our Expectations of Ourselves – Our Perceived Reality**

The key insight is that guilt lives in the gap between what we expect of ourselves and how well we believe we're meeting those expectations. Both sides of the equation can be distorted. Chapter 2 deepens this by exploring *why* women carry so much guilt — examining the role of socialization, family messages, culture, and the expectations women absorb from girlhood. Use this first session to introduce yourselves, share what brought you to the book, and begin exploring the foundational ideas together.

## Discussion

### Question 1

**How would you describe the Guilt Equation in your own words? Did it resonate with your experience?**

- *Can you think of a recent example where you can identify both the expectation and the perceived reality?*
- *Was the gap real, or was your perception off?*

### Question 2

**The book suggests that our expectations of ourselves are often unreasonable. Which of your expectations do you suspect might be unreasonable?**

- *Where did those expectations come from — your family, culture, social media, profession?*
- *How long have you been carrying them?*

### Question 3

**Have you ever caught yourself discounting what you ARE doing while focusing on what you're NOT doing? What was that experience like?**

- *The book describes this as a distortion in "perceived reality."*
- *What would it look like to see your reality more accurately?*

#### Question 4

The author writes that many women carry the thought, “I never feel like I’m doing enough.” Does that thought feel familiar? Where does it show up most?

- *Does it show up in particular contexts? With certain people?*
- *What would it feel like to genuinely believe you are doing enough, right now, as you are?*

#### ☒ Personal Reflection

Write your own Guilt Equation for a current source of guilt. What is the expectation? What is your perceived reality? Now — is the expectation reasonable? Is your perception accurate?

#### ☒ Host Tip

Some women may feel emotional as they begin to name their expectations and recognize how heavy they’ve been. Normalize this. You might say: “It’s common to feel something when you see these patterns clearly for the first time. That’s the work starting.”

## Session 2: The Four Furies

Reading: Chapter 3 — *The Four Furies of Unreasonable Expectations*

This session dives into the “Four Furies” — the core categories of expectations that drive women’s guilt: Constant Caretaking, Hyper-accountability, Seeking Perfection, and Having It All. You will explore how your interactions with family, culture, and society have shaped these expectations.

### Discussion

#### Question 1

The book describes how women are socialized to be caretakers from a very young age. What messages did you receive growing up about what it means to be a “good” woman, mother, daughter, or friend?

- *Were these messages spoken or unspoken?*
- *Do you still live by any of those messages?*

#### Question 2

Hyper-accountability means taking responsibility for things that aren’t truly ours to carry. When have you caught yourself feeling responsible for someone else’s feelings or choices?

- *What did it cost you to carry that?*
- *What do you imagine would happen if you didn’t carry this load?*

#### Question 3

Where does perfectionism show up most for you — in your work, your home, your appearance, your parenting, your relationships?

- *When you fall short of “perfect,” what does the guilt feel like?*
- *What would “good enough” look like instead?*

#### Question 4

The myth of “having it all” implies that women can do everything, at a high level, simultaneously. Do you feel this pressure? Where does it come from?

- *Have you ever been told you “can have it all”? How did that feel — inspiring, crushing, something else?*
- *What do you think you may have sacrificed in the pursuit of having it all?*

### Question 5

**Are there women in your life, or public figures, who seem to have a healthier relationship with these expectations? What do they do differently?**

- *What specifically do they seem to have let go of? Is it a specific expectation, or something about how they hold expectations in general?*
- *Is there anything you could borrow from how they move through the world?*

### ☒ Personal Reflection

Of the Four Furies, rank them from most to least present in your life right now. For the top one, write: "One expectation I'm ready to challenge is \_\_\_\_\_."

## Session 3: Why Guilt Feels So Sticky

Reading: Chapter 4 — *Why Guilt is So Sticky, and How We Can Get Unstuck*

This session explores a surprising truth: we don't just suffer from guilt — we sometimes use it. The book identifies three reasons guilt feels sticky: 1) We use it as motivation (*"If I stop feeling guilty, I'll stop trying"*); 2) We use it as emotional protection (guilt may be easier to feel than grief, anger, or helplessness); and 3) We use it to demonstrate care (*"If I feel guilty, it proves I'm a good person"*).

### Discussion

#### Question 1

**Have you ever used guilt as motivation? What did that look like? Did it work? How did it make you feel in the meantime?**

- *Did the guilt actually produce the results you wanted, or did it mostly produce exhaustion?*
- *What might motivate you instead — if not guilt?*

#### Question 2

**The book says guilt can serve as a shield against harder emotions, like grief, anger, disappointment, or helplessness. Does that ring true for you?**

- *Is there a feeling underneath your guilt that you might be avoiding?*
- *What would happen if you let yourself feel that instead?*

#### Question 3

**Do you believe, even a little bit, that feeling guilty proves you care? That if you stopped feeling guilty about something, it would mean you don't care enough?**

- *Where did this belief come from?*
- *Can you think of someone who clearly cares deeply but doesn't carry much guilt?*

#### Question 4

**If you could wave a magic wand and remove all unnecessary guilt from your life, what scares you about that? What excites you?**

- *Do you worry that releasing guilt would mean you'd stop caring, stop trying, or stop being a "good" person?*
- *What part of your identity has become entangled with your guilt? What might you gain if you could separate the two?*

#### ☒ **Personal Reflection**

Choose one source of guilt you've been carrying. Ask yourself: Am I holding onto this guilt because it's useful, because it's protecting me from something harder, or because it proves I care? What would I need to believe in order to let it go?

## Session 4: Making Change — The SPEAK Method

Reading: Chapter 5: Identifying Your Guilt Triggers & Chapter 6: Quieting Your Guilty Thoughts

This session introduces practical strategies for reducing guilt: cognitive restructuring — treating guilty thoughts as rough drafts that can be revised — and shifting toward neutral or positive thoughts. You will also explore the importance of nurturing a growth mindset and practicing self-compassion.

### Discussion

#### Question 1

**Chapter 5 asks you to identify your personal guilt triggers — the people, situations, or words that reliably activate guilt. What are yours?**

- *Are there certain words — like “should,” “always,” or “never” — that signal guilt has been activated?*
- *Where do you feel guilt in your body? Does naming the physical sensation change anything?*

#### Question 2

**The book introduces the idea of treating guilty thoughts as “rough drafts” that can be revised. Can you think of a guilty thought you carry that might deserve a rewrite?**

- *What is the original thought? What cognitive distortion might be at work — all-or-nothing thinking, catastrophizing, mind-reading?*
- *What would a more balanced, accurate version of that thought sound like? Try writing one out loud together.*

#### Question 3

**The book connects guilt reduction to a growth mindset — the belief that we are always learning and never required to be perfect. Where is it hardest for you to apply a growth mindset to yourself?**

- *Do you extend more grace to others for their mistakes than you do to yourself? What makes it so different when it's you?*
- *What would it mean to treat a setback or mistake as information — as data about where to grow — rather than proof of failure?*

#### Question 4

The book introduces the “Friend Test” — asking how you would respond if a close friend described your exact situation to you. Try it now with something you currently feel guilty about. What would you say to her?

- *Why is it so much easier to be compassionate toward others than toward ourselves? What belief gets in the way?*
- *What does self-compassion feel like when you actually let it in, even briefly? How is it different from making excuses?*

#### Question 5

The book introduces the “Three Good Things” practice — intentionally noticing what went well each day. What would it feel like to end each day focused on what you did right, rather than where you fell short?

- *Try it right now: go around the group and each person share one thing that went well today — no matter how small. What do you notice?*
- *How does deliberately shifting attention to what went well change the “perceived reality” side of your Guilt Equation?*

#### ☒ Personal Reflection

Choose one guilty thought you carry regularly. Apply the Friend Test: write down what you would say to a close friend who came to you with this exact thought. Then write one more balanced version of the thought for yourself. Finally, write down three things that went well this week — no matter how small.

#### ☒ Host Tip

This session can bring up vulnerability — women may feel exposed as they name their thought patterns out loud. Normalize it. You might say: “The fact that we can see these patterns is exactly how change becomes possible.” If the Friend Test exercise lands well, consider doing it live as a group with one volunteer’s example — it often becomes a powerful moment. The Three Good Things exercise at the end is a built-in mood lifter; don’t skip it.

## Session 5: Changes in Our Relationships

Reading: Chapter 7 — Engaging with Agency

In this chapter, you will learn why it's so important to allow disappointment (yours and others'), set clear and consistent boundaries, and learn to delegate. These are skills, not personality traits — which means they can be learned and practiced.

### Discussion

#### Question 1

The book describes how many women struggle with “allowing disappointment” — both disappointing others and sitting with their own disappointment. Where does this show up for you?

- *When you imagine disappointing someone, what do you fear will happen?*
- *Has someone's disappointment in you ever been as catastrophic as you feared?*

#### Question 2

What is one boundary you've been meaning to set but haven't? What's getting in the way?

- *Is it guilt, fear of conflict, or something else?*
- *What would setting that boundary make possible in your life?*

#### Question 3

Delegating is often hard for women because it bumps up against the expectation that we should do everything ourselves. What do you find hardest to delegate? Why?

- *Do you feel that delegating means failing, or that others won't do it “right”?*
- *What would it free up in your life if you could delegate one thing this week?*

#### Question 4

Which of the SPEAK method strategies feels most accessible to you right now? Which feels hardest?

- *Is there one small step you could take this week?*
- *What would it look like to practice one of these skills — Show Up, Pay Attention, Examine, Take Action, Keep Going — in a real situation this week?*

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☒ **Personal Reflection**

Write yourself a “permission slip.” Complete this: “I give myself permission to \_\_\_\_\_ without guilt, because \_\_\_\_\_.”

## Session 6: Final Thoughts & Looking Forward

*Reading: Conclusion*

This final gathering is about integration, celebration, and looking forward. You've spent weeks examining guilt together. Now it's time to honor the work you've done, name what's changed, and commit to what comes next.

### Discussion

#### Question 1

**What surprised you most about this book or this experience? Was there an “aha moment” that shifted something for you?**

- *Was it a concept, a question, or something someone in the group said?*
- *How has your understanding of your own guilt changed since Session 1?*

#### Question 2

**How has your relationship with guilt changed, even slightly, over the course of these conversations?**

- *Is there a specific expectation you've started to challenge?*
- *Is there a boundary you've set — or are closer to setting?*

#### Question 3

**What has this group meant to you? What was it like to talk about guilt openly with other women?**

- *Was there a moment someone said something that changed how you see your own guilt?*
- *What will you carry forward from this experience?*

#### Question 4

**If you could share one insight from this book with a younger woman in your life — a daughter, a niece, a mentee — what would it be?**

- *What do you wish someone had told you earlier about guilt and expectations?*

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### ☒ **Personal Reflection**

Each woman writes a letter to herself, to be opened in 3 months. In the letter, describe: the guilt you are choosing to release, the expectation you are choosing to challenge, and the life you are choosing to reclaim. Seal the letters and exchange with another member, who will mail it to you in 3 months. (Or place it aside and open it yourself.)

### ☒ **Host Tip**

Consider starting a group text or chat to stay connected after the group ends. Some groups choose to continue meeting monthly — around new topics, new books, or simply to check in. Encourage members to start their own groups. Every woman in your group is now equipped to host one.

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# Getting Started: Your Checklist

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## Before You Host

- Get your own copy of *Guilt Free* and read it through
- Decide on a format: in person or virtual
- Choose a meeting cadence: every 2 weeks (recommended), weekly, or monthly
- Pick your first meeting date and time
- Invite women personally (text, email, or in person works best)
- Decide on a location or set up a recurring video link
- Print or share the Group Agreements and reading schedule
- Review Session 1 discussion questions so you feel prepared

## Invitation Template

Feel free to copy, paste, and personalize this message when inviting women to your group:

Hi [Name],

I'm starting a small book discussion group around a book called *Guilt Free: Reclaiming Your Life from Unreasonable Expectations* by Dr. Jennifer Reid. It's about the guilt women carry — as mothers, daughters, partners, professionals — and what it takes to start putting it down.

I thought of you because [personalize: you always seem to put everyone else first / we've talked about this / I think you'd bring such a great perspective / etc.].

We will plan to meet every two weeks for about 6 sessions. We'll use a discussion guide, so no one needs to prepare anything beyond reading. It's not therapy — it's just women being honest together about what we carry and how to live with more freedom.

Our first meeting would be [date] at [time] at [location/Zoom]. Would you like to join us?

I'd love to have you in the group.

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## Social Media Sharing

Want to share that you're hosting a group? Here are some ready-to-use captions:

*"I'm starting a Guilt Free Group — a group of women reading and discussing Guilt Free together. If you've ever felt like you're carrying more than your share, this is your invitation. DM me to join. #GuiltFreeGroups #GuiltFreeJourney"*

*"What if you could explore your guilt with a group of women who truly get it? I'm hosting a Guilt Free Group and there are a few spots left. Message me for details. #GuiltFreeGroups"*

*"Read it together. Release guilt together. I'm gathering a small group of women to go through Guilt Free by Dr. Jennifer Reid. Six sessions, honest conversations, no judgment. Who's in? #GuiltFreeGroups"*

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**Thank you for being part of the Guilt Free Movement.**

*Every group you start is a ripple.*

*Every conversation you host is an act of care.*

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For more resources, visit [jenniferreidmd.com](https://jenniferreidmd.com)

Substack & Podcast: **A Mind of Her Own**

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