

WHY SOME OF US CRY AND WHY SOME OF US CAN'T

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Over the past several years I've been asked to give my workshop titled *Crying: Wet Eyes, Dry Eyes*. In addition, I co-authored a book with Dr. Darcie Sims called, *The Crying Handbook*. I've studied what the experts have said about the crying process. Here are my thoughts on crying. See if any of this rings true with you.

WHY DO WE CRY?

In their May 18, 2012 article titled *Why We Cry: The Fascinating Psychology of Emotional Release*, psychologists Jay Efran and Mitchell Greene, stated:

Physiologically speaking, emotional tears are elicited when a person's system shifts rapidly from a state of high tension to a period of recalibration and recovery. Individuals typically describe such shifts as "letting go," "going off duty," or "giving up."

They add that people cry in connection with problems that haven't yet been solved, and perhaps never will be. When our brain is forced to begin to take in the horrible reality that our loved one has died, and that it begins to sink in that it is real even though it **doesn't feel real**, tears indicate that we are giving up the struggle—the struggle that even though there are thousands of brain cells that tell us this person is alive, there are hundreds of new brain cells that tell us the opposite is true. Of course we know what this is. It's called denial. Think of denial on a scale such as this:



When we are at 100% denial, not one brain cell has “gotten it.” However, as the reality of the death begins to sink in, we begin to move down the denial scale.

With the death of a loved one, it's very likely that we never get to 0% denial. Years later there are still parts of our brain that cannot believe this precious person will never be on earth again. Each of the thousands of times our brain goes back to the harsh reality, our emotions rise up—and for some of us—we cry. This indicates that our brain is starting to give up the struggle as we realize more that life has forever changed.

WHY CAN'T I CRY?

Many people have asked me that question. Have you ever said any of the following since the death?

- ◆ I start to cry and then I won't let myself.
- ◆ What is wrong with me?
- ◆ I start to, then it just won't come out.
- ◆ The tears just aren't there.

REASONS FOR NOT CRYING

1. When we cry over a loss, it means that our brain is moving forward with the process of letting go of Denial. Understand, **I don't mean letting go of the person**, but rather letting the harsh reality of the loss begin to sink in. It goes something like this: If I cry, then it means that this loss is real. And if it is real, it will hurt so much I could not bear it. If I don't cry, then part of my brain can still protect itself from the horrible truth that she (or he) is gone-and gone forever. And forever is so final I just can't take it.
2. People in my life need me to be strong. If I cry, I may look weak. My loved ones need me to step up and care for them. Crying is not what they need to see. Therefore, I must not cry for their sake. They've been hurt so much already, I don't want to add more pain to their life.
3. Another reason that people don't cry is because they have the following belief: “If I start crying, I'll never be able to stop.” Sound familiar?
4. Some people are just not criers. The corners of our eyes are where tears slide out. These are called our *lacrimal glands*. Some people are born with lacrimal glands that leak all over the place. You know these people. They begin to cry when a sad movie hasn't even begun. You say, “You're crying and the movie hasn't even started.” And they respond, “I know, but it's going to be so sad.” Other people have lacrimal glands that do not leak so easily. Do not judge the people in your life who've not shed many (or any) tears since the death. They're wired to not cry easily.
5. Another group are those who were brought up with parental warnings about crying. Have you ever heard this one: “If you don't stop crying—I'll give you something to cry about.” Or “Be a man.” Or “Toughen up.” These folks may grow up still hearing the admonitions about letting their lacrimal glands leak.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BEGINNING TO CRY

If getting those tears out isn't easy for you, are you are motivated to give it a try? Let's look.

1. Watch your swallowing response.

Believe it or not, the swallowing response is in direct opposition to the crying response. That is, swallowing is incompatible with crying: you cannot do both at the same time. For you, it may be that, as soon as you feel yourself start to cry, you have developed an automatic swallowing response without realizing it. Go ahead and swallow right now. Go ahead, do it as you read these words. See what it feels like? The next time you feel yourself start to cry, **do not swallow**. This may take a bit of practice, but if you are unconsciously swallowing, you may learn to cry again, just as you've learned not to. Okay?

2. Don't stop your crying.

This is similar to not swallowing. Once you start to cry, let it all out. Remember, there is no such thing as too much crying. Letting it all out is what people report as a "good cry." Don't stop yourself.

3. Find a safe place to cry.

Create a setting for yourself where you can let some tears flow. Here is an example: Set aside a half-hour to an hour, more if possible. Do not have anything planned afterwards. Find music that reminds you of your loved one. Bring pictures. Bring an article of their clothing. Bring a towel and tissues. If there is someone else in the house, inform this person what you plan to do, so he or she will not come in, distract you, and interrupt your crying. Go to a safe room, preferably your bedroom. Sit on the bed, turn on the music that reminds you of your loved one. Look at the pictures and try to catch yourself from swallowing. Be gentle with yourself. Don't beat yourself up if the tears do not come easily. Just let happen whatever happens.

4. Revisit memories.

Just reading this next suggestion may get to you. So be ready. Sit there, close your eyes, and let yourself go back into the past and recall a pleasant or joyful time you had with this precious individual. See your loved one's face, their eyes, their cheeks, their neck, their chin. Look at their body—their hands, their hair, their arms. In your mind go back to a place where you are watching this beautiful person walking or running or sitting or sleeping. Let the memories of this person flow over you.

We all cried as babies. Then, we grew up. Some of us cried a lot, some only a little, some not at all. You have experienced the worst loss of your life. Hopefully, this article has given you a little insight into the amazing world of tears. Perhaps you want to share it with someone. Whatever you do, always remember, there is no such thing as "too much" crying. And, when you are in the presence of someone who begins to shed tears, remember this little poem: *You let 'em cry until they're dry.*

I wish you nothing but sweet tears.
