

Why Crying is Coping and Why You Should Cry If You Can

By Lou LaGrand

Have you been taught to "keep a stiff upper lip" at all times and keep your emotions to yourself? Or were you admonished as a child when you began to cry with this overzealous parental statement: "You want something to cry about; I'll give you something to cry about?"

Most of us have been taught that crying is a sign of weakness. Furthermore, if you are going to "break down" (what a terrible demoralizing statement) we are directed to do it in privacy, never in public.

In reality, crying is a very normal human response. It is a temporary release from internal and external conditions--a way to embrace the pain of change in doses that can be managed. More specifically, it is nature's antidote for pain.

So why should you cry? Let's examine why.

1. First and foremost, crying is coping. That is a belief you should keep repeating and repeating in your self-talk, especially if you have been heavily influenced by well meaning adults who planted the seeds of negativity towards crying. Give yourself permission to cry.
2. Shedding tears is coping because it is one sure-fire method of facing the pain of loss. Facing pain, not running from it, is what eventually leads to healing through acceptance of what cannot be changed. Avoiding pain prolongs grief and suffering as it heightens tension and anxiety. Shakespeare put it this way: "To weep is to make less the depth of grief."
3. Biochemist William Frey, who has studied tears and their function more than any other scientist, found that emotional tears (from sadness, anger, fear, etc.) actually remove toxins from the body. On the other hand, tears of joy or happiness have far fewer toxic biological byproducts. It is not at all a stretch to say that crying can keep you healthy. So if they come when you are in church, on a bus, when you hear a certain song, or when walking, see them as your good friend.
4. Stress on the body is lowered when you have a good cry. Thoughts and emotions are filtered through the cells and cause significant physiological alterations. Anger, guilt, or depressions--common responses when mourning--initiate alarm reactions in the body, and crying reduces the physical effects on the cardiovascular system.
5. And, what if you can't cry because the "don't cry belief" is so deeply ingrained? Look for another way to release those pent up feelings. Write, paint, draw, or sketch what you are feeling. Work it out in some cause. It may help to go to a therapist and talk about your inability to cry and what has caused the blocking of a normally healthy response.

Tears communicate, lubricate, elicit sympathy, change mood, reduce tension, and help us cope with a multitude of losses throughout life. They are truly of ingenious design because of the many functions they serve. The therapeutic value of crying is clear: accept, encourage, and nurture crying in yourself as well as those you support in times of change. Don't rush for the Kleenex.

Let a good cry happen. In fact, never miss an opportunity to shed tears and allow the stress, confusion, and frustrations to come pouring out. And notice how laughter and tears go hand in hand, sometimes in the same breath. Together, they are twin resources to be given high priority in all types of healing and adapting to life changes.