

The Why, How and When of a Good Cry

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Last month while I was leading a professional development seminar a young career woman asked me something like, “How can you stop yourself from crying in front of your boss?” My thought was, “How sad” as I recalled releasing tears in front of *safe managers* and supporting others as a manager myself.

The biochemist William Frey, author of *Crying: The Mystery of Tears*, concluded that nearly one half of tears shed are letting go of sadness and curiously enough are often expressions of happiness. Sometimes tears express fear, anxiety or anger. Many of us cry until we laugh or laugh until we cry. Frey also concluded that tears, along with perspiration, urine, and exhalation rid our bodies of toxins and other waste.

Yet our culture has strong taboos about crying. “Don’t be a wimp!” “He broke down.” “She couldn’t hold it together” and the famous Donald Trump line “You’re Fired . . . especially if you cry!” So what’s a working gal supposed to do if she has a boss who overtly or covertly enforces a crying ban?

Here are some tips:

- If it is risky for your manager to witness tears, breathe deeply, feel your feet on the floor and look up towards the ceiling. Looking down tends to take us deeper into feelings.
- Another option is to imagine a bubble around yourself and as you breathe in focus on strengthening your solar plexus. These first two strategies help you contain tears until you can take them somewhere emotionally safe.
- If containing is just too much, say, “Excuse me, I will be back in five minutes.” Go have your cry, blow your nose and drink some water.
- Next find a nourishing person and/or place to have a good cry. Let it out.
- If the tears are stuck in your stomach, chest or throat, have a bubble bath, watch a tender movie, read old love letters or curl up on your sweetie’s lap. Relax until you can weep.
- Don’t swallow tears.

As my mentor, Gwendolyn Jansma said, “Better to cry on the outside than drown on the inside.”

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