Cry It Out: When You Literally Can't Even With Suffering

*Elective 1*

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| **AUTHOR(S):** | Sara Beth Berman |
| **SUMMARY:** | In today’s media landscape, there is a tremendous amount of literature that could help us deal with the bad things that happen in our lives. Crying it out is a popular concept, seen in everything from memes to movies. In this session, we’re going to spend some time dissecting some of the sadder things out in media in recent years, to help us grapple with the culture of “grief porn” that is so prevalent in young adult literature and movies today. - *Submitted by* *Sara Beth Berman* |
| **TOPIC(S):** | Jewish Values, Life Cycle Events, Jewish Text |
| **LEARNING OBJECTIVE:** | **Broad Subject and Skills**   1. Being prepared to discuss bad things at camp is an important thing. 2. Learning about the concept of theodicy – that God can exist while bad things happen in the world – is important for camp, where tragedy still occurs, from minor rain delays to serious, tragic loss. 3. Discussions about God at camp, and elsewhere, fosters spiritual development in both staff and campers. 4. Using pop culture texts (music, movies, etc.) can frame discussion topics that are hard for both staff and campers to swallow.   **Understanding**   1. Pop culture texts are good grabbers when trying to bridge a serious conversation. 2. There is a tension in our world between God existing and bad things happening. 3. I am capable of discussing these challenging subjects with my campers in a meaningful way. 4. Theodicy is a term that can be used to describe a wide range of evil things that happen in the world where God exists.   **Essential Questions**   1. What is theodicy and how does it play into life at camp? 2. What do Jewish texts say about theodicy? 3. How can pieces of pop culture help me open / facilitate discussions at camp?   **Knowledge and Skills**   1. Counselors will know how to define the concept of theodicy in an age-appropriate way for campers. 2. Counselors will be able to discuss these issues with their campers. 3. Counselors will be able to pull on pop culture resources to deal with heavy issues at camp and in their lives. |
| **AUDIENCE:** | * High School, Staff * Medium or small group - need at least a minyan of participants (10) for maximum effectiveness in conversation |
| **TIMING:** | 90 Minutes |
| **APPENDICES:** | **Essential Texts**   1. [Tadashi is Here - Big Hero 6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQu2arZ4mDk) 2. [Mia’s Grandfather Letting go - If I Stay](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8ahsNLNEBg) 3. [Teens React to The Fault In Our Stars](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjMqMLZIt30) 4. For the text on comforting the mourners: [http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/widows-in-jewish-tradition/2/#](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/widows-in-jewish-tradition/2/) 5. On “Risqué” topics in YA Literature:    1. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kelly-jensen/what-are-grownups-afraid-_b_3625783.html>    2. And <http://on.wsj.com/1969Y9x> 6. Bonus Materials:    1. [Tadashi's Last Moment with Hiro - Big Hero 6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kk6egTmHrRk)    2. [Baymax's Sacrifice - Big Hero 6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQm0MUe1lv0) |
| **MATERIALS NEEDED:** | * AV Setup - to project video with sound * Flip Chart and markers |
| **SET-UP DETAILS:** | * There should be tables and chairs in order to group up and work. * Need AV to project clips |

**Session Timeline & Outline:**

**CRY IT OUT: Opening Activity // Time: 25 minutes**

1. The Worst:
   1. AGREE: We’re going to talk about stuff in this session that can be hard to talk about. I’d like to create a circle of trust. The topics we’re broaching can be sensitive and I want you to feel safe discussing them - this means everything from loss, death, and, in today’s world, politics. Can we get a thumbs up that we’ll support the people in this session in a non-judgmental fashion? Thank you!
   2. Cry it out (15 minutes):
      1. We’ve all experienced something where we “literally can’t even” although, in reality, it was just figurative. Let’s make a list of things that try our very souls:
         1. Two Columns: Can’t Even @ Home / School; Can’t Even @ Camp.
            1. Examples - @ Home / School: death, natural disasters, terrorism, accidents, illness, political strife; @ Camp: people getting sent home, injuries, trips cancelled, bad weather, external issues outside of camp.
      2. So we have all of these examples up here. How do you deal with them?
   3. This session will have two parts (10 minutes):
      1. First: We’ve identified some real times and situations in camp when having tools to “even” when you or your campers “can’t even.” We’ll utilize these examples, in a modern context, to help us determine how we can be most effective at our jobs - in helping our communities to “even.”
         1. For example:
            1. The kitchen runs out of grilled cheese at lunch. What is your response?
            2. Your camper’s parent dies during the session and they have to go home. How do you help your campers process? (PLEASE include your social workers, leadership, and year-round staff in dealing with such a situation. You can’t and should not do this alone!)
      2. Second: We’re going to identify what’s going on in the zeitgeist that influences the way our campers and co-staff process traumatic events. You can find examples in pop culture of this “grief porn” trope in books, movies, and songs. This is not a new concept and we’re going to find some more recent examples that your campers and co-staff have probably enjoyed. This will help you develop a shared narrative when discussing things that are sad and / or bad.
      3. PS - a third thing: By design, this session contains spoilers from film, books, and movies. There are spoilers in this session. I’ll warn you, but let’s be honest, this is a session about dealing with TRAGEDY - spoilers aren’t going to kill you, but they may very well make you [a] stronger [counselor].
   4. Discussion questions:
      1. How does pop culture literacy help you connect with your co-staff and campers?
      2. How does identifying points of tragedy (or disappointment) help you be better prepared for dealing with these things at camp?
      3. How can pieces of pop culture help you open / facilitate discussions at camp?
      4. What are your biggest fears and / or concerns about addressing this at camp this summer? (We will return to this question at the end of the session.)

**Step-by-Step Session Description // Time: 55 minutes: I Literally Can’t Even**

1. Grief Porn as a Genre (10 minutes):
   1. We have a few pieces that we can read about how sexuality, violence, and other topics are approached in teen literature. There are a few pieces about teens and this concept to read, and I’d like to highlight this passage:

*No matter how much YA advocates rally and fight, those grownups will still be pointing to fictitious arguments and digging out problems where no problems exist. And no matter how much success these adults have at pulling books from curriculum or bookshelves or crying to have awards given back to books that are about “real teens,” the truth is that they’re forgetting that real teens are reading these books and are getting the context because it’s a context they’re living every day.*

*Challenging the books doesn’t change the teen years.*

*These challenges are instead reminders that adults want to shield teens from their own contextual experiences. Because when you take away the books that are problematic, you are also able to take away rape, violence, gangs, sex, and every other scary trigger that is part and parcel of the lives of teens today (and the lives of teens in the past).*

*...They need these books to help them remember they’re not alone. They need those reminders that this isn’t always a fair or kind world.*

[*http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kelly-jensen/what-are-grownups-afraid-\_b\_3625783.html*](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kelly-jensen/what-are-grownups-afraid-_b_3625783.html)

Discussion Questions:

* + 1. How do you feel about the books and movies that your campers are watching?
    2. Do you think that the media your campers consume are “too old” or “too mature” for them?
       1. How does it change after hearing this OpEd in the *Huffington Post*?
    3. How does your opinion change about your campers consuming this media after talking to them and getting to know them?

1. Jewish Text (10 minutes): There’s a Jewish way to deal with this stuff, of course! Let’s look at some texts. I pulled some texts that specifically have to do with treating the less fortunate in Judaism - the stranger, the widow, and the oppressed.

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| המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים | |
| May God comfort you among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem | *Ha’makom yenahem etkhem betokh she’ar avelei Tziyon vi’Yerushalayim* |

*Hebrew Texts from Mechon-Mamre.org / English from BibleORT and/or Sefaria.org. Texts compiled in this article:* [*http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/widows-in-jewish-tradition/2/#*](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/widows-in-jewish-tradition/2/)

1. Clip Show (35 minutes):
   1. [Tadashi is Here - Big Hero 6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQu2arZ4mDk) (3:07 clip - 10 minutes)
      1. Discussion questions:
         1. How could this clip help you understand your campers who are upset about a loss?
         2. How was Hiro’s reaction similar to the way that campers at camp deal with loss?
         3. What do you think it was like for Hiro to see video of Tadashi?
            1. How can this help you work with campers who are dealing with some sort of loss?
         4. How does this clip help you understand some of your campers’ feelings about bad things happening - at camp or outside of camp?
   2. [Mia’s Grandfather Letting go - If I Stay](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8ahsNLNEBg) (3:35 clip - 10 minutes)
      1. Discussion Questions:
         1. What does this clip teach us about love?
         2. How can this clip better help us love our campers who are struggling with some kind of loss or sadness?
         3. How do you, as a counselor, like the grandfather in this clip?
         4. How can you use this clip when thinking about a camper or staff member who has to go home early for some reason?
   3. [Teens React to The Fault In Our Stars](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjMqMLZIt30) (9:45 clip - only need to watch to 6:45 - 15 minutes)
      1. Discussion Questions:
         1. What does this clip teach us about what our kids are reading and / or watching?
         2. How can this sort of format help us understand what our campers are into these days?
         3. How close to reality do you think this book / movie is?
            1. How does this book / movie impact us? Our campers?

**Bringing it Back to Camp // Time: 10 minutes**

* How can clips like these help you be a better counselor?
* How would you use clips like these at camp?
* How would you use clips like this to reach / teach other staff? Campers?
* How would you use the media we studied today with campers? With staff?
* Which of the media most surprised you?
* How does this media - and the media experience for today’s teens…
  + ...impact how you react to tragic news (while at camp)?
  + ...impact the way we / our campers view the world today?
* What’s one thing you learned today that will help you be a better staff member - and how will you use that skill?

**Additional Notes for Bringing it Back to Camp:**

These clips are great for staff training, and could be used with counselor-in-training programs or high-school-aged campers to discuss media and how to deal with upsetting feelings.