

It's Alright to Cry

Elective

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SUMMARY:	In this session, we will discuss the discomfort people can experience while others are crying and learn tools and strategies for being more comfortable and appropriately supportive around crying and sadness.- <i>Submitted by Natalie Rothstein</i>
TOPIC(S):	Emotional expression
LEARNING OBJECTIVE:	The goal of this session is for participants to feel more comfortable with the idea of being around others when they are expressing emotion through crying and prepared with tools to help support themselves and others.
AUDIENCE:	For staff, group of 10 or more.
TIMING:	90 minutes.
APPENDICES:	None.
MATERIALS NEEDED:	Speaker to play audio from a phone or computer (not required if they're not available and you need to play directly from device)
SET-UP DETAILS:	Room with chairs in a circle or in rows. Have the "Guidelines for a Safer Space" hung up where everyone can see them.

SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:

Total time: 90 minutes
 Introduction- 15 minutes
 Identifying the Discomfort- 20 minutes
 The Science of Crying- 20 minutes
 A Fresh View on Crying – 20 minutes

Introduction- 15 minutes

Welcome and introduction (facilitator to introduce self if necessary). Goals for today's session:

- Identify what's uncomfortable about crying
- Understand what crying means and the science behind it
- Establish tools and views to help with being around crying in the future

Go over guidelines for the room, creating a safer space (hung up on the wall), offer opportunity for anyone to add guidelines or to ask clarifying questions.

- This is a judgement free space
- Using “I” Statements
- Confidentiality
- Ask clarifying questions
- Self-regulate and self-care ((i.e. it’s ok to step outside)
- Facilitator is available after
- It’s ok to be raggedy

Share audio of “It’s Alright to Cry” from *Free to be You and Me*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y52bs0aX6v8>

Identifying the Discomfort-20 minutes

Lead a discussion about with the following questions:

- Think of a time where you were uncomfortable with a camper or another staff member crying in front of you. What was that experience like for you? What did it feel like?
- What makes you uncomfortable about seeing other people crying?
- What is it like for you to cry in front of other people?
- What are your thoughts and beliefs about crying? Is it alright?

The Science of Crying- 20 minutes

Provide participants with The Science of Crying Handout and go through the information. Offer opportunities for discussion and questions.

Scientific theories or facts about crying (Source: Time.com)

- The answer to why we cry, is actually complicated.
- Crying as an emotional behavior is unique to humans.
- Crying is triggered by a range of emotions:
 - Empathy
 - Sadness
 - Anger
 - Happiness
 - Physical pain
 - Discomfort
 - Anxiety
 - Grief
- Some people don’t emote through crying.
- Lacrimal gland is the origin point of tears.
- Crying is a form of nonverbal communication.
- Crying is stereotyped by identities.
- Crying is often stigmatized for the context in which an individual is crying.
- Tears trigger social bonding and human connection
- “Crying signals to yourself and other people that there’s some important problem that is at least temporarily beyond your ability to cope” – Jonathan Rottenberg (emotion researcher)
- Emotional tears are different from the ones people shed while chopping onions
- Tears show vulnerability – which is critical to human connection.

- “The same neuronal areas of the brain are activated by seeing someone emotionally aroused as being emotionally aroused oneself” - Michael Trimble (behavioral neurologist)
- Tears setting off empathy is likely a result of evolution.
- Evidence is mixed about the benefits of crying. Some evidence says crying doesn't do anything beneficial and people don't feel good after crying and other evidence recognizes crying as a self-soothing behavior that offers release or an emotional detox.
 - Humans are often then conditioned for it to serve either purpose.

A Fresh View on Crying- 20 minutes

Below are thoughts on ways to work through the discomfort of being around or supporting someone who is crying.

- **Compassion-** Although you may not cry yourself or may not be comfortable, the person crying is feeling intense emotions coming out through crying.
- **Understanding-** Crying is an emotional release for some people and is a vulnerable experience in which they are signaling a need for support.
- **Be gentle with yourself-** Being gentle with yourself for being uncomfortable is extremely important to help you stay calm in a crying situation.
- **Don't Have to Stop Them-** There's often a temptation to problem solve to help someone stop crying. Sometimes letting tears out until someone is done crying is really important. Of course, when someone shows signs that they are no longer in control and overly activated, it can be helpful to calm them down.
- **Be present and patient-** Staying present by focusing on your breathing and what you're feeling is a helpful way to work through the discomfort of someone else crying.

Closing – 10 minutes

Ask participants to go around and name one goal they have for future instances when they are around others who are crying. Offer opportunity for any final questions.

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP:

Suggested reading for a facilitator:

<http://time.com/4254089/science-crying/>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/psych-unseen/201804/why-do-we-cry-exploring-the-psychology-emotional-tears>