

#5 SELF-CARE SKILLS FOR TEACHERS

Tearing-up: A far cry from being weak

I have no idea why but the last few days from before the kids returned to school and on that day in particular, I have been so emotional, I had to do everything to not cry. The worst was when I saw the nervous faces of the learners sitting in front of me in class.

All people shed a tear at some time; to keep the eyes moist; to flush out irritants but also in response to high states of emotion like loss, sadness and even touching situations.

Stress crying is not unusual either. Some people cry when angered, or when frustrated, or when overwhelmed or when fearful. And these emotions are all linked to high stress levels.

In fact, **emotional tears** contain high levels of stress hormones and it has a high protein content making it chemically different to the tears we produce when getting smoke in your eyes, for example. Protein-rich tears are stickier causing it to run down our cheeks more slowly and making it more obvious to others. Researchers think that this may explain why other people react so strongly to our tears.

Stress crying helps us release emotional energy. When we temporarily feel unable to cope, crying is the way our nervous system respond to a stimuli overload. It is one of the ways we **self-sooth** and bring our emotions back to balance. Emotional crying calms us down and can reduces distress.

SELF-CARE SKILLS FOR TEACHERS: DEALING WITH DEFENSIVE REACTIONS

And as has been the case over the last few weeks with preparing to return to class and then not but having to wait another week for the 'big day' when the pupils return, the build-up of stress is enough to make anyone cry.

However, so often we suppress our tears. We don't like the loss of control and vulnerable state we feel in while crying. Also we want to avoid the distress we feel after the fact.

To make matters worse, society sometimes frowns upon criers and crying males in particular. It is seen as a sign of weakness. Female tears are further viewed with suspicion for being manipulative and not something a professional woman should succumb to.

Be assured, there is nothing wrong with having a good cry. If that is how you deal with emotional stress, cry, even wail if you must.

However as teachers are the ones who sets the emotional tone in class, it is maybe not such a good idea to do it in front of the learners. Rather excuse yourself and seek out a private space, alone or with a trusted colleague or a professional caregiver at school to let it out.

Holding back may make things worse. It could add more stress, put more pressure on your already overloaded nervous system and use energy needed somewhere else as we try to, at all cost, control our facial expressions and our demeanour. In the end, while we are trying to be strong, the feeling of being overwhelmed only increases.

We often feel better after a good cry. It can bring a sense of relief and letting go. However, know this, research shows that this doesn't happen immediately. In fact we will probably feel worse right after a crying session. **After a while however, it does seem to lift our mood particularly when we had been comforted by someone while crying (social soothing).**

I believe that nothing in our physiology is without a purpose. Cry if want to cry! And make sure to support the ones among us who deal with stress by shedding a tear. We all have different ways to deal with stress.

Check your supply of tissues and take care

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