



Steps to Serenity

• Frequent criers •

*I feel like my child cries all the time.
Is this normal? What can I do?*

Mrs. Simi Yellen

*addresses parents of kids ages
three-six:*

When little kids cry it's because they don't have the vocabulary to express themselves yet, or they don't have the ability to press pause, process and use the words they've been taught. Certainly until age five (and this number varies according to the maturity level of the child), crying is a normal reaction. However, we want to move our children away from their natural reaction of crying, teaching them the skill of how to express themselves verbally instead.

How can parents achieve this? Every time parents meet their child's need while he's crying, the crying behavior is reinforced. The child has no reason to attempt problem solving in a more mature way since the crying reflex he's been born with is still achieving the desired result.

Instead, parents can calmly tell the crying child, "There's nothing to cry about, sweetheart. Use your words to tell me what's wrong."

If your child doesn't respond to the words "there's nothing to cry about," find another creative way to word your request to communicate the same message, such as, "Mommy can't understand you when you cry. Find your words."

When the child stops hiccupping and is ready to speak, even if you know exactly what's wrong, say to him, "Tell Mommy what's wrong."

In the beginning, you can help them to formulate their words. "You're upset because Shimmy took your ball? You wanted to play with that ball first? So say, 'I wanted to play with the ball first!'"

By doing this, you're actually laying down neuropathways in their brain so that they make the following connection:

When something is wrong, I talk about it, instead of cry.

Of course this method isn't foolproof. Sometimes, as much as we give our child an opening to calm

down, she simply can't, or it takes him an inordinately long time to do so. In these cases, I would approach the child later, when she's completely moved on. I would talk to her, saying, "Remember what happened earlier when you couldn't stop crying? You could have told Mommy what you wanted and then I could have helped you right away."

If your child's teacher complains that she's crying in school, I'd hand the teacher the same methodology that you're working on at home. I'd tell her, "We're working on that at home by not feeding into the negative behavior and using verbal skills instead." If home and school are on the same page, the whole

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process will be smoother for everyone.

Finally, if your child cries excessively in social situations, you should encourage playdates in your home. That way you can monitor the situation and work with your child in the moment. Once a child is around five, you can also start drawing on past experiences to help your child to navigate social terrain. For example, say, "Remember when Moti came over last time and you

cried so hard because of 'X'? What do you think you can do differently this time?"

Mothers need to have patience when helping their children through this transition. Like any skill, kids need to habituate themselves to it. The maturity level of the child is also a factor, and maturity can't be rushed. Instead, Mom should try her best not to give in to the child's crying demands and continue to patiently reinforce this new skill until it becomes second nature for her child.

Mrs. Simi Yellen has been positively transforming homes through her teleconference parenting classes and private consultations for over a decade. Her 10-week series entitled "Raise the Bar Parenting" empowers parents to raise respectful, responsible, and cooperative children through curtailing arguing, chutzpah, and other negative behaviors we have come to tolerate. To find out more about classes, MP3s, and consultations email SimiYellen@gmail.com.

Rabbi Noach Schwartz

*addresses the issue of older kids
crying (ages six-eleven)*

When children are young, they cry to have their needs met. Once they reach the stage where crying is not a socially accepted means of obtaining what they want, the crying serves a different purpose — when older kids cry, it signifies that they are in pain.

How can we determine and address the source of their pain? If a parent would bring a nine-year-old child for treatment, first I would assess whether the child is in physical pain. I would recommend that parents have the child evaluated by their pediatrician as well as their dentist. It could be that the child has a high threshold for pain, or he doesn't know how to verbalize his pain, so only when something else triggers his emotions does he cry excessively, but all the while something may actually be

physically wrong with the child which he can't convey to you.

Next, I would evaluate the child's psychological state. When a child cries too often at this age, it may be due to a chemical imbalance in his brain. He may be suffering from depression or anxiety. When something is organically wrong with the brain chemistry, a combination of behavioral therapy and pharmaceutical intervention would be the right way to treat the problem.

If physical and psychiatric conditions are ruled out, the issue is probably rooted in the child's social life. Put simply, there's something going on in your child's life that's upsetting him. Maybe she's internalizing her grandfather's death more than you realized, or she's sensitive to the fact that Mommy and Tatty aren't getting along so well. Perhaps he's worried that his father has lost his job, or she's been hurt by a good friend who abandoned her for another girl.

I've had clients who cried because they felt marginalized in the classroom since they were either weak students or were too smart. Children may be reacting to an older sibling who isn't toeing the line religiously or suffering from a disability.

This is only a sampling of the myriad things that can disrupt a child's emotional equilibrium and cause sadness and pain. Everyone reacts differently to these emotions, and some people cry.

Therapeutically, I could employ a number of behavioral modalities to help the child come to terms with his circumstances. Often, a child with crying jags can benefit from *short-term* medication use in conjunction with therapy, as the medication soothes him enough to be able to work on his issues more readily.

I would try to get to the crux of what is bothering the child, bringing him back to that moment when he cried, asking him what caused the crying and helping him

to strategize as to how he could push off crying next time.

I would also discuss the social consequences with the child, such as asking him, "Do you think that people enjoy being friendly with kids who cry all the time? Would you want to be friends with someone who cries a lot? How would you feel?"

If the child is crying for attention, I would affirm his behavior and then explore alternate ways of getting his parents' or friends' attention without crying.

It isn't easy parenting a child who cries all the time. As Dr. Susan Schulman says, low-maintenance kids are like cars that run on their own, but our high-maintenance kids are going to need a lot of tune-ups in the form of love and attention

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from their parents. This means that when your child is crying, remember that she's in pain, hold her, soothe her and don't compare her to her younger sibling who is already more mature than her. Talk to her and try to figure out what's bothering her.

Help her to develop techniques just as she would in the therapist's office.

Remember, your children may not be able to say, "I'm feeling alone. Please hug me," but their crying should send that message loud and clear.

Rabbi Noach Schwartz, LCSW-R, CASAC (credentialed alcohol and substance-abuse counselor), CSAT, is a behavioral and trauma therapist. He treats men and children with behavioral-health issues in group settings and at his private practice in Boro Park.

Let's Talk Teens:

Mrs. Devora Kozlik responds:

Tears are the body's natural biological response to both happy and sad situations. When we cry, it actually has a positive effect on our physical and emotional well-being. Crying is a G-d-given gift that is part of our system for emotional regulation.

Teenagers are highly reactive to their environments and hence are especially susceptible to emotional dysregulation. It is within the realm of normal for them to experience extreme emotional highs and lows, and crying is part of that equation. The question becomes, how can parents and educators detect abnormally reactive teenage emotions and differentiate them from normal exaggerated teenage emotions?

Parents need to be attentive to their teen's mood patterns. If you notice that your child is spending more time alone, is having more intense crying patterns than usual, or other irregular behaviors, gently open the door so that your child can confide in you.

If you know that your teen is suffering through a painful experience such as the loss of a friendship, etc., don't ignore these obvious stressors, and keep an eye open to how it is affecting your teen. (Although



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Sometimes having a caring and empathetic caregiver is all the teenager needs. When you walk and talk with her, you're helping her to take an edge off her stress.

scientifically, females internalize stressors four to five times as often as males, make sure to keep an eye on your sons as well, who may not cry as often but may still need help.)

By giving your teen your time and undivided attention, you will be in a position to see if she needs professional help. You will also be positioning yourself as the first line of defense. Sometimes having a caring and empathetic caregiver is all the teenager needs. When you walk and talk with her, you're helping her to take an edge off her stress by normalizing her feelings and being there for her.

Engage her in deep breathing exercises (such as inhaling and exhaling nasally, or inhaling and blowing out slowly through her mouth) will give her relaxation tools to calm down when emotionally dysregulated.

I recall one particular teenage client who cried excessively during each session. Her parents each came from their own dysfunctional families and they didn't have the tools to tune into their daughter's emotional

pain and insecurities. She grew up in an environment that reinforced her helplessness, and her parents were unable to help her to contain her emotions.

We employed a variety of therapeutic modalities to help her to achieve emotional balance.

But beyond these professional techniques, I encouraged her to practice breathing exercises and to do yoga regularly. She began walking, swimming and following a healthy nutritional plan based on fruits and vegetables. The exercise released endorphins, "feel-good" chemicals that influence brain chemistry, and the deep breathing oxygenated her blood and physically relaxed her. By nourishing her body and her soul, she began to see herself as an individual with capabilities and strengths. Her self-esteem improved greatly and her crying jags diminished significantly. She learned to contain and regulate her emotions.

Parents who are self-aware and comfortable in their own emotional state have a healthy basis from which to give to their teens. They hold the gift of emotional well-being and healthy self-esteem in their hands. These parents need only to reach out to their teens to provide them with this nourishment they so desperately need.

Parents who don't have this healthy basis should invest in developing it for themselves so that they can tune in to their teens and be sensitive to the emotional pitfalls that may disrupt their social lives and their academic pursuits. It is a most worthwhile investment. 

Devora Kozlik, LMSW, EMDR, Hypnotherapist; individual, couples, adolescent, child therapist; specialist in anxiety, depression, and trauma. She can be reached at 347-631-7003.

Yael's new novel, "A Fragile Thread," is now available in your local bookstore.



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I first contacted you regarding a shidduch for my daughter. By the time the first cycle was up, she was dating

her chosson. By the time the second cycle was up, she was a kallah. This shidduch had been redt many times over a three year period, but it didn't not happen until Chevrah Lomdei Mishnah came into the picture. I then asked you to learn as a zechus for another child who was having difficulty. He will be starting a new job on Monday, B"H. There are no words to thank HKB"H and to thank you for this program.



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