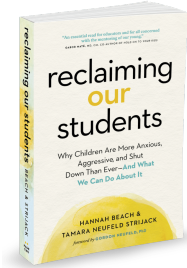




I am not a Drama Queen – Why we cry over small things

by Hannah Beach | Jan 18, 2021 | Emotional Release, Expression, Feelings | 0 comments



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Yesterday as I was walking up the stairs to my front door, I saw a little yellow finch, dead and laying by my doormat. It wasn't ruffled or bruised. It simply looked like it was peacefully sleeping. It was just too much. My eyes welled up and down came the tears.

We are in the midst of a pandemic. I am constantly hearing from overwhelmed parents and educators and I am trying to support them the best I can. I am angry, worried, deflated and stressed about the state of the world's emotional health as I watch the news and witness the palpable racism and hate. I miss seeing and interacting with people. And I achingly miss my elderly mother whom I cannot see. And yet, no tears. Sadness, yes. Frustration, for sure. But flowing tears, none there.

And yet when I looked down at this vulnerable, fragile, and beautiful little bird laying dead on my doorstep, my tears came.



This is how it often is with people. Our tears can be very close, just underneath the surface – hesitating, resting there waiting for release.

It's the small things that can make the crack, the gentle opening in which our feelings can find a home, stirring us just enough for us to spill open. For the past months I have been experiencing big, intense feelings, but often it has been as if I was experiencing them cerebrally. I've talked about them, and sometimes I've ranted about them. But it was this smaller moment, this unrelated and unexpected moment of loss that moved me.

And this is often how it is too for children. In fact, although we may recognize this in ourselves, we typically see this even more in little people, as they often experience life more intensely. Big emotions often spill out of them in unexpected times and because they may not have yet developed impulse control, these emotions also sometimes come out in very raw and untempered ways.

We may see a child step on a worm and burst into intense tears, fearing they have killed it.

Or maybe their pencil breaks and it was their favourite pencil. And it was just too much and a tantrum ensues.

Or they can't get their zipper up as it is stuck in the fabric and the tears begin to flow.

When we see these things we may be quick to call these children out. *Really?! Seriously?! It's just a pencil for goodness sake. You seriously are a drama queen.*

In these situations, what we don't see are the layers of sadness or frustration that were lying just beneath the surface. What we don't see is that this child had feelings that needed to come out.

This can be true at all times in a child's life, as life can be emotionally turbulent, but this is especially true in a time of

calamity. Right now children (again, all of us!) are experiencing heightened frustration, disconnection, sadness and loss. Their emotions are stirred up and need somewhere to go.

Emotion seeks expression

Emotion seeks expression, but in order for emotion to be expressed, it must feel safe to come out. It can be hard for children (all of us!) to look directly at the things which frustrate them, hurt their feelings, fill them with sadness or overwhelm. Without a specific access point – there is not always a clear way to find release. Feelings can build up and rest inside a child in a muddled sort of way. And when a moment comes along that lightly touches a feeling inside them, an access point for release is often found and emotion is expressed.



What can we do when we see a child's feelings spill out in this way?

Listen to them.

Let's give the children in our care the simple gift of listening deeply to what they have to say, even if it sounds ridiculous to us and even if it comes out in ways that are raw. These are their feelings and these feelings are real to them.

Even if it may sound small to us, their big feelings over the loss of a broken pencil or a stuck zipper are real for them. When we can

come alongside their feelings of frustration or loss, we can make room for them to share what it is they are experiencing inside of them. And in this experience of being seen and heard, they may find some emotional release. The attunement they experience from us in that moment, helps them to feel safe and to eventually adapt to life's challenges.

We don't need to fix it or make it better. We just need to listen and come alongside their feelings.

Aww, I'm sorry love. I know how much you loved that pencil.

Or

I get it, zippers can be so frustrating!

Help kids to find words to express the sensations in their bodies.

Children, especially young children, are less likely to have words they can attach to the sensations we call 'feelings'. Sometimes a child's feelings come out in ways that don't naturally bring out our warmth. Sometimes their big feelings don't spill out in tears, which may call forth our caring. Sometimes their big feelings spill out, or rather, *explode out* in a tantrum. Yet, a tantrum which erupts in a frustrating or overwhelming moment, is simply a child's big feelings finding expression. When children have words for their internal-world experiences and sensations, they have more opportunity to talk about them and share them in ways that are less explosive.

When the big-feeling moment has subsided and the child is calmer and close to us, this can be a great time to open up a small discussion about their big feelings. We can reflect back to that moment and help them make a link between what their body did (the screams, stomps, banging) to what they might have felt. This can help them over time to slowly connect the sensations in their body, to words that describe their feelings. Usually kids have no idea why they might have burst out, or stomped around or banged the table with their fists. Our connecting their physical actions to potential feelings, can help.

Keep it short and simple, no long conversations. The point is to casually connect what their body did, with what they might have

been feeling.

I was thinking about what happened earlier today when your pencil broke. That was really upsetting for you. I think you might have felt both sad and frustrated. I saw your feelings burst out of you as your feet were stomping and your voice got really loud. Sometimes our bodies show us how upset we are. I know that was hard for you and I just wanted you to know that I understand. I feel sad and frustrated sometimes too.

We may worry that the child may always express their feelings in these big, physical ways if we don't admonish them for these explosive displays of emotion. We can rest assured that this is very unlikely. When children feel heard, safe and listened to, and as they develop a language for their feelings, they will begin to share and express themselves using their words more and more.

Expect more emotional spills right now.

Expecting more emotional turbulence does not help it go away, but changing our understanding and expectations may reduce the frustration WE feel when the children in our care express themselves in big ways or in unexpected moments. Knowing that emotional expression is a sign of emotional health, not dysfunction, may bring us more patience. Yes, raw expression can be challenging to be on the other end of, but it also means that the child's feelings are alive and well. It means that they are not shut-down. (*Yeah. Whatever. I don't care.*) We need our feelings in order to have empathy, to be curious about another's perspective as well as to develop impulse control. Although big eruptions of feelings can be hard, especially in unexpected moments, it indicates that a child is feeling, sometimes deeply – and this is a good thing.

Children are living with a lot of frustration and loss right now. This means that they will have more stirred up within them. Considering this, we can expect more outbursts of emotion these days.

Make room for expression.

Since we know that children are more emotionally stirred up right now, we need to plan for ways to help them find release. By providing general outlets for release and expression, we provide a

safe home for their feelings to come out. There are many simple and easy ways we can make room for feelings to be expressed that don't even involve talking about it or any expertise.

Some ways we can preemptively channel emotional energy are through:

- Free play (In free play, children are naturally drawn to play out, digest, and release whatever is inside them.)
- Listening to and/or making music
- Physical movement (rolling, running, sports, dance!)
- Stories or storytelling, especially ones that tug at our hearts
- Writing (journals, free-writes, poetry, stories)
- Drama (even just acting out concepts or simple books together with no words!)
- Singing together
- Simply being outdoors in the natural world
- Drawing and colouring or even just [doodling](#)! (Try it with music as a backdrop. This can help even more emotion to be expressed.)

If you want to check out specific activities for kids ages K-12, my Inside-Out Companion Guide that comes free with our book [Reclaiming Our Students](#), has 60 pages of activities to support the expression of feelings. And my book/CD [I Can Dance My Feelings](#) has specifically selected music and voice-over facilitation to support children in using playful movement to express themselves. These may be resources that are helpful for you and most libraries have them for lending.

Don't label the child as "too much."

And finally, let's remember not to label a child as 'too much'. Who we think we are, matters a lot.

When we call kids a "drama queen" or tell them that they are too much, they may begin to try to make themselves smaller. They may actively try to inhibit the expression of their feelings. (*I'm too much. I bug my teacher. My mom can't handle me.*) When we hide who we really are and twist ourselves in order to be accepted, this can increase anxious feelings. (*Who I really am is too much for everyone, so I must reduce who I am in order to be accepted*).

Additionally, inhibiting one's expression of feelings may actually increase spontaneous outbursts as when one tries to suppress

emotion, it has less opportunity to move and flow and then may burst out unexpectedly with small triggers.

When children know that their feelings are invited and welcomed by us, they sense the wholeness of the invitation to *be themselves*. We see and accept all of who they are. And in our 'seeing' of who they are, they discover through our eyes, that not only is emotion OK, but that who they are as emotional beings is welcomed and celebrated. And in this way, they regulate through us and we support them to come to the fullness of what it means to be human.

Make room for everyone's feelings, including our own.

It's a hard time for everyone right now. If we see our own feelings spilling out in unexpected moments, let's be gentle with ourselves. Let's make room for our feelings to be expressed and know that that is part of taking care of ourselves.

And as we continue to seek ways to support the emotional health of the children in our care, let's remember to make room for their feelings. And if they step on a worm and their tears begin to flow and their reaction seems intense to us, remember that it may truly be that they are simply upset for this loss of life, and feeling it intensely. But it may also be that this smaller moment of loss made room for some of their other feelings to come out as well. We won't know nor do we need to know. All we need to know is that kids need us to be there for them during these experiences so that they can rest on us and find a safe space to feel.

Warmly,



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For more information on **The Science of Emotion**, please see the course with this name available through the Neufeld Institute – www.neufeldinstitute.org.

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