

Tears Are Not Forever



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Do you cry sometimes?





When you fall . . .

or lose something  
you love.

“Ouch!”

“Where’s Bear?”



You cry when  
you're sad or mad.

Crying helps!

Crying gets the  
hurt out.





# Tips for Caregivers and Parents

All toddlers cry, off and on most days. Their tears express so many big emotions: frustration, anger, sadness, fear. Our job as caring adults is to soothe a crying child and also teach self-soothing.

**Talk face to face.** Always try to get down to your child's level by kneeling or sitting. This shows empathy and helps defuse upsets. If your child is in tears, use simple, reassuring phrases like:

- “Are you having big feelings?”
- “I can help.”
- “You’re safe.”
- “It’s okay to cry.”
- “Let’s get some tissues.”
- “Do you want a hug?”

**Take a breather.** You can retreat to a quiet place to help a crying child breathe deeply and calm down. Being out of the spotlight may ease the tears a little more quickly. It’s helpful to teach toddlers the skill of deep breathing as an overall way to self-soothe. During peaceful moments, practice taking deep breaths in through the nose for a count of five, and then out through the mouth (slowly) for a count of five. Repeat over and over, as needed. Your child will gain a skill that can be used to relax or recharge throughout each day.



**Sing, count, or imagine together.** Young children respond to soft words, spoken or sung. Your calm demeanor and gentle voice will help a crying child regain a sense of calm. Redirect by singing a song, counting together, or picturing a quiet place. This is much more effective than having a big reaction yourself, such as “Stop that crying,” “Don’t be a baby,” or “Settle down!” Even if the crying frustrates you, you can model an unruffled expression and a reassuring tone. “Tears are not forever” can become a part of your vocabulary at home or in your child care setting as a way to spread the message that upsets don’t last and that, if we work together, we’ll find a solution.

**Have a handy comfort kit.** Tears and runny noses are part of daily life with toddlers. Make sure you’re always stocked with what you need: tissues, wipes, hand sanitizer, bottled water, a teddy bear, a cozy blanket.

**Remember the basics.** Toddlers do better when you’ve anticipated their needs: meals, snacks, a drink, rest, exercise, potty, and play. Create routines that your child can rely on. Having structure each day promotes physical, mental, and emotional health and may decrease stress levels. This, in turn, can make it less likely that your child will burst into tears or have a tantrum.

**Teach words for feelings.** Young children often feel overwhelmed by strong emotions because the feelings are frightening or confusing. On top of that, toddlers don’t yet have the language skills to verbalize what happened or what they may need to make the situation better. Each time your child cries or has an upset, see if you can help by not only soothing but also teaching the words that identify the feeling: *sad, mad, scared, worried, confused*. Your child will start to understand and share feelings more clearly and develop a greater sense of security.

**Share your own feelings too.** If your child sees you crying, explain in simple words how you feel: “I’m sad right now.” “I was crying happy tears because I was so glad to see Grandma after so long.” Reassure your child that everyone sheds tears sometimes. When we talk about our feelings, we let other people understand what’s happening inside us.

**Encourage empathy.** Show young children what to do when someone else is crying, such as gently putting their arms around a sibling or friend, offering tissues, and saying “I’m sorry you’re sad.” Keep sharing the message that we all have big feelings and all of us experience times when we need help.

