

## The Value of Tears

*tears are the healing not the hurting - Pam Leo*

In early childhood settings tears are not unfamiliar. The beautiful thing about young children is that they are yet to learn that expressing our true emotions makes others uncomfortable. As we move through life, the responses our emotions receive sends us a message about which feelings are safe to express and which feelings should be hidden or experienced alone. The problem with this is that from an early age we start to tell children that there is no place for tears, especially if those tears are about something the adult listening can not 'fix' or change. We tell them "they're fine" or that "that is enough now" when our own tolerance level is pushed. Although a child's tears can be triggering for us as adults, it is crucial that we learn to 'be with' children through their tears.

Children whose tears are dismissed by adults will learn to stuff their feelings down. This is where the term "bottling up" your feelings comes from. A child who holds the emotions inside will have them come out in other ways. Examples of this may be a child who retreats and becomes isolated, an overly anxious child who spends most of their day begging to be held or a child who is so frustrated that they begin to act out with aggression.

### Did you know?

One of the first things we do when we are born is cry. Its instinctual, it's natural and we are a good at it right from birth. There is a reason for that

Our tears contain the stress hormone cortisol? So when we release our tears we also release our stress and that's what helps us **FEEL BETTER**.

Telling children to "stop crying" or that "they're okay" contributes to unhealthy bottling of feelings. Just because the child has stopped crying doesn't mean they have stopped experiencing the emotion.

Born with the ability to cry



Tears help release cortisol from the body



# Co-Regulation

Sometimes it's hard to know what the right response is when children cry. Maybe someone is telling you they cry when you are around because you pick them up implying you are the problem or maybe you are told that you need to ignore them so they learn their crying won't get them the attention they want.

These ideas can be debunked by understanding what co-Regulation is. In early childhood settings we often write out goals for supporting self regulation, it is less common to see the word Co-Regulation come up in planning.

*so what is it?*

Co-regulation is the process of using own nervous system to calm another's. It is our gentle, calm and patient presence that allows a child to feel soothed in our company. In order for a child to learn to eventually self-regulate they must first experience co-regulation with a caring adult over and over and over again.

Educators can use co-regulation to build trusting and responsive relationships with children. Children that feel safe in a relationship that supports the process of Co-Regulation are more likely to explore their environment than children who feel dismissed or shamed for their tears

## Tips for Co-Regulation

1. Regulate yourself - you must first make sure you are aware of and able to calm your own emotions so you feel ready to support someone else
2. Increase Proximity - come in close to the child if they allow you to. The child may open their arms to be held, hugged or climb onto your lap.
3. Show empathy - empathy is the ability to feel some of what someone is feeling, imagine what it would be like to be in that child's shoes
4. Use emotion holding statements - acknowledge and accept the emotions "you're so upset that mum had to leave, it can feel scary being apart from mum, I'm here with you"
5. Time - This can be hard because of competing needs but it is essential that provision is made for educators to be able to 'be with' children while they experience and move through their tears



### National Regulations

Regulation 155

### Interactions with children

An approved provider must take reasonable steps to ensure the service provides education and care in a way that:

- encourages children to express themselves and their opinions
- allows children to undertake experiences that develop self-reliance and self-esteem
- maintains the dignity and rights of each child at all times
- gives each child positive guidance and encouragement toward acceptable behaviour
- considers family and cultural values, age, physical and intellectual development and abilities of each child.

Guide to the NQS, p.450

## WHAT DOES THE EYLF SAY ?

### I. SECURE, RESPECTFUL AND RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIPS

Educators who are attuned to children's thoughts and feelings, support the development of a strong sense of wellbeing. They positively interact with the young child in their learning.

Research has shown that babies are both vulnerable and competent. Babies' first attachments within their families and within other trusting relationships provide them with a secure base for exploration and learning.

Through a widening network of secure relationships, children develop confidence and feel respected and valued. They become increasingly able to recognise and respect the feelings of others and to interact positively with them.

Educators who give priority to nurturing relationships and providing children with consistent emotional support can assist children to develop the skills and understandings they need to interact positively with others. They also help children to learn about their responsibilities to others, to appreciate their connectedness and interdependence as learners, and to value collaboration and teamwork.

EYLF Belonging, Being Becoming, p.13