

What Makes a Grown Man Cry?

I wish you could sit where I sit and see what I see when I'm among a group of dads who have daughters. There is this kind of tender, fierce strength that I bear witness to time and again as I interact with fathers whose hearts are turned and activated.

You see, when it comes to fathers of daughters, there is a sacred space inside every dad's heart that is uniquely impacted by his relationship with his girl.

I never take it for granted that I have the privilege of being invited into the inner circle of men via The Abba Project. I hear their stories. I listen to their fears. At other times I witness their tears. All are equally impactful. All are equally powerful.

I don't assume that men typically think of their tear ducts as being tied to their greatest inner strength. But I believe they are.

Here's the thing about tears:

- They come from the most alive place inside each of us.
- They are connected to the deepest spaces of our heart.
- They let us know that we care in substantial, significant ways.
- They move us emotionally, spiritually, and relationally.
- They awaken us to greater awareness.
- They reveal that we're linked to people and causes that profoundly matter.

In an article titled, *"Why Do We Cry? The Science of Tears,"* Dr. Nick Knight describes three kinds of tears that are naturally created by our bodies:

1. **Basal tears or "worker" tears** that keep our eyes

lubricated,

2. **Reflex tears** that help us wash out irritants, and

3. **Psychic tears or 'crying' tears** that correspond to strong emotions, ranging from pleasure on the positive end to stress, anger, sadness, suffering, and even physical pain on the negative end.

If I may be so bold, I would like to add my own fourth category.

4. **Authentic or 'heart' tears** that are expressed in direct proportion to the quality of a connected relationship that evokes this emotional response.

Stated otherwise, heart tears communicate the reality of what we carry most deeply within us, whether conscious or unconscious, in direct correlation to those we love and that which we love.

I can't begin to tell you the number of times I've sat with men and women who say they were unaware their tears were even there until they showed up. Their surprising release of tears then served as the path to intimate depths within themselves, thus allowing for even deeper introspection and self-awareness by which to honor that which is being disclosed.

I'll always remember the night during one of our Abba Project meetings when the heart of one dad, a firefighter named Scott, was powerfully expressed in a way that touched all of us in the room. While he allowed himself to be transparent, tears fell down his cheeks, giving each of us a treasured gift, a gift of his vulnerability. We were all changed as a result.

When Scott started The Abba Project he and his 22-year old daughter Katie weren't as close as he wanted them to be. They didn't talk much, and with her now living a couple of hours away, their times of real connection were few and far between. Then there was a turn of events and all of a sudden Katie was back living at home. Heading into their dad-daughter date

night one particular month, Scott had the opportunity to open up the conversation about WORDS.

I'll let Scott, with his permission, tell the story in his own words:

"We had our date at the house and when I went through the questions, asking her about words I've spoken that have hurt her, she couldn't remember any. So I brought up things I thought had possibly had an impact on her. Still she couldn't remember them. The wanting to know and the asking are what had the impact on her.

"Then I read her the letter I'd written. She listened and then said, "'Thanks Dad. I'm putting it in my 'Affirmations Box.'

"I didn't even know she had one. She asked if I wanted to see it and then went to get it. She started taking things out of this medium-sized box and showed me what was there. I quickly noticed that there wasn't anything in it from me. Until now, that is. She told me she was putting the letter I had just written her into the box.

"It was then that I had a realization. Not only did I have no idea that she had an 'Affirmations Box' but I suddenly remembered that I had one of my own. I just hadn't ever called it by that name.

"I actually have a bag I use for work and asked her if she wanted to see it. I showed her that I have saved four things she'd made me that were in the bottom of it. One of them was a picture she'd drawn me when she was about 12 years old of Multnomah Falls with a truck driving on the road below and the words 'Oregon's Biggest Waterfall' written on the top. It was quite a bonding time for us. (Tears were readily streaming down Scott's cheeks by this point in the story, as were ours).

Scott then concluded by saying:

"Thank you for having me write the letter and read it to her so that I could find out about her box. I asked if I could help fill up her box now that I know about it.

She immediately said: 'Yes.'"

What makes a grown man cry? From years of observation I'd say it's when:

- Something or someone profoundly touches his heart
- He feels emotionally connected to his daughter (or son), especially when he tells her what he's feeling or thinking about her
- His heart is broken over her life choices, past and present
- His heart aches over regrets in his parenting, past and present
- He longs for a better and closer relationship with his daughter, even if his tears stay inside himself

Summing up, a good man cries when his heart tells the story through his eyes.

You have to believe me when I say that most of us girls *feel* our father's love when you as our dad are moved to tears when talking about how proud you are of us, when you tell us how much you love us, and when you express your affirmation of the gifts you see in us. When you "wear your emotions on your sleeve," it can make your words significantly more believable and impactful (even if it might feel uncomfortable while it's happening).

And even if you're not one given to tears, just remember that some people (like me) believe that it takes bravery for any of us to cry. Why? Because it takes courage to be seen as vulnerable and tender, and typically we won't risk displaying raw emotion unless we feel safe and really feel something in the depths of our heart.

So Dad, why not give yourself permission today to let your daughter see how you really feel about her when she looks into your eyes while witnessing your love for her that just might come in the form of your tears. {eoa}

Dr. Michelle Watson has a clinical counseling practice in Portland, Oregon, and has served in that role for the past 17 years. She is founder of The Abba Project, a 9-month group forum that is designed to equip dads with daughters ages 13 to 30 to dial in with more intention and consistency, and has recently released her first book entitled, *Dad, Here's What I Really Need from You: A Guide for Connecting with Your Daughter's Heart*. She invites you to visit [for more information](#) and to sign up for her weekly Dad-Daughter Friday blogs, where she provides practical tools so that every dad in America can become the action hero they want to be and their daughters need them to be. You can also follow or send feedback on Facebook and Twitter.

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