

Your Personal Coach

By

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I'm wondering about crying. I do not believe I am depressed, but I live alone and watch a lot of television. I cry often...at sweet stories, at commercials, at the news, and at stories that would make anyone cry. Do I need to be concerned about this in view of 9/11/01 or what? Thanks for being there.

Fannie M.

Dear Fannie,

You are certainly not alone these days. The horrific events of September 11 and beyond have changed us individually and as a nation. The media is filled with images and stories of unbearable tragedies – of lives cut short, of brutal violence, of grieving families.

It is very difficult to be a caring person and not be moved by empathy for others who are suffering. This ability to feel another's pain is the root of compassion. Did you know that the word compassion actually comes from Latin and literally means, "to suffer with?" Buddhist teacher Jack Kornfield calls compassion, "the quivering of the pure heart – when we have allowed ourselves to be touched by the pain of life."

From your letter, you sound like an emotionally open person, one who resonates with and responds to stories that are heartwarming as well as sad. That is a wonderful quality – to have your heart open to the world. It is a beautiful way to express your connection to all other beings. But like everything else – it is possible to have 'too much of a good thing.'

How much are you crying, Fannie? Is it a tear or two when a story moves you or is it an hour of crying that immobilizes you and keeps you from going about your life? As in all things, balance is a desirable goal.

You mention that you watch a lot of television. What is a lot? And what are you watching? Personally, I think it's a good thing to stay up with the news. Watching stories about the 9/11 events and the war in Afghanistan is a good way of remaining informed as well as participating in our collective process of grieving and sorting through our individual feelings. But again, balance is the watchword.

If you find yourself glued to the 24-hour news channels, you might want to take a break. Watch a movie, a sporting event (How 'bout those Redskins!), or a gardening show. And most importantly, take some breaks from television altogether. Go out with your friends, take a walk, go fishing, or volunteer with a community organization.

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It's especially important for people who live alone to find good, meaningful ways to connect with other people. Make sure you have time in your life for your friends and family. This is particularly true around the holidays – like Christmas or Hanukah – when we have such strong expectations for a sense of belongingness and family.

Meanwhile, keep an eye on your crying. Is it getting more intense or frequent (rather than less so)? If you are suffering any other signs of depression, such as changes in your sleeping or eating patterns, or find yourself feeling too blue to enjoy your life, then you might want to find someone to talk to.

Tragedies, like the one we are dealing with now, often bring up unresolved grief resulting from past events in our lives – issues that have never fully been worked through. There are many excellent counselors who can help you understand and express your feelings if this is the case.

I send you and everyone my best wishes for a holiday season filled with many blessings and a new year in which all beings in the world will be peaceful and safe.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com, call 473-4004, or direction questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D. is a personal coach, motivational speaker, clinical psychologist and author of “After the Darkest Hour” and other nonfiction books. She lives in Manteo. To learn more about personal coaching, visit her website at www.fullpotentialliving.com.