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[**Just Cry it Out.**](https://www.elephantjournal.com/2015/05/just-cry-it-out/)



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The blue balloon floated peacefully up, a white tail of string trailing behind.

We watched in horror as it made its way in slow motion toward the top of the two-story restaurant, every second seeming like an eternity.

It wiggled around as it touched the ceiling, and when it finally settled, that’s when the blood curdling, high-pitched scream pierced the air. Heads snapped in unison toward us from the surrounding tables.

Our extended family of 14 had just completed a week at Family Heart Camp where we practiced empathy and the principles of Non-Violent or Compassionate Communication (NVC). It was quite eye-opening for most of us as good communication does not come naturally to the majority of our family.

One of the things they teach is how to listen and use empathy rather than try to advise or solve problems.  Another is how to, when communicating, understand the need behind every action or emotion.

After completing the camp, we headed out for a final family dinner. Clayton, my three-year old nephew and the youngest member of the family, had taken a long nap. He was rested and cheerful and he had a new blue helium balloon from a street vendor, tied securely to his wrist. We had high hopes for a celebratory evening.

And that’s when the balloon somehow loosened itself from his wrist and floated to the ceiling causing huge wails to erupt through the entire restaurant.

Embarrassed to be at the table responsible for disrupting the atmosphere, members of my family offered advice and quick solutions. Feeling my face redden as I felt all eyes on us, I told my brother, Z, that I could run outside and get Clay another one. “Please don’t,” was his response.

My brother, unfazed by any unwanted attention from neighboring tables, picked up Clay and held him in his arms, unapologetically allowing his high-pitched screams.

Instead he tuned everyone out. It was just him and his little boy at that moment. In a state of complete presence, he held his little, blonde son close to his chest and said, “You must feel sad.”

Through gut wrenching screams, Clay responded, “I FEEL WEAWWY SAD!”

Z took a moment to process his answer.

“You loved your balloon, didn’t you?”

“I WUVVED MY BAWWOON,” cried Clay, still pointing at the balloon on the ceiling.

Z hugged him closer.

“It’s hard to lose something you love.”

“YEA-H-H-HH!!!” hiccuped Clay.

Z continued to rub his back and Clay’s breathing became slightly more regulated.

“Do you need to cry it out?” Z asked Clay gently.

Clay just nodded.

Gradually, Clay regained composure and we finished out dinner in peace. While I was busy being embarrassed, my brother remained present enough to empathize with his son’s sense of loss and sadness rather than trying to immediately fix the problem.

As we left the restaurant that evening, Clay took one last look at the balloon on the ceiling and waved.

“Goodbye balloon,” he said with a smile as Z swung him up on his shoulders and walked out into the warm evening.

Z had managed not only to put his newly acquired NVC skills to use, but to create a special learning moment for his son. My brother and Clay taught me some important lessons that evening:

*1)  Through my brother’s empathy, Clay felt heard and understood which is sometimes the only thing people really want and need.*

*2)  Sometimes people need time to grieve rather than having others try to come up with a quick solution for the discomfort or pain.*

*3)  Young children haven’t dealt with loss—so while losing a balloon seemed like nothing to me, for him, it was the end of the world.*

*4) Sometimes, you need to just cry it out.*