

# If you cry while watching movies, it is probably a sign of your emotional strength

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You have probably found yourself weeping quietly, or even suddenly sobbing uncontrollably, while watching a movie. Common culprits include "Marley and Me," "The Color Purple," "Schindler's List" and

"The Lion King."

You may have tried to blubber discretely so your dry-eyed companions didn't think you were a sook (and no doubt you had a sneaky look sideways to see if they were glassy-eyed too), or you may have boldly sobbed away.

Why do we cry in movies? Is this a sign of emotional weakness (hence hiding it from your friends) or an indicator of strength—evidence of [emotional intelligence](#)?

Good movies are carefully crafted to engage us and be deeply absorbing. They transport us into the world of their characters: to see as they see, feel as they feel, and even totally identify with a character in some cases. We know movies are not real, but we are so engrossed that we emotionally react as though they are.

Some are based on true stories, and knowing this makes them even more potent. The emotional power of some movies is especially captivating: they're not called tearjerkers for nothing.

## **The love hormone**

Neuroscientist Paul Zak [has studied](#) the effects of compelling stories, showing watching them can cause the release of [oxytocin](#).

Oxytocin is best known for its role in childbirth and [breast feeding](#), increasing contractions during labor and stimulating the milk ducts. It is also released in response to positive physical contact—hugging, kissing, sexual intimacy and even petting animals—as well as through positive social interactions.

Consequently, it has been called the "[love hormone](#)."

As [social animals](#), our survival depends on [social bonding](#), and oxytocin is critical. It helps us to identify and attach with our essential caregivers and protective social groups.

According to another neuroscientist, Robert Froemke, [recent research](#) shows oxytocin has an even broader impact and acts as a "volume dial," amplifying brain activity related to whatever a person is currently experiencing.

So, although oxytocin may be targeted biologically at ensuring strong social bonds, it also serves to enhance [emotional responses](#).

Crying in the movies is a sign that oxytocin has been triggered by the connections you feel due to vicarious social experience. Your attention is captured and emotions elicited by the movie's story.

Oxytocin is then associated with heightened feelings of empathy and compassion, further intensifying feelings of social connectedness and you pay even further attention to the social cues of the characters in the movie. Hence the sudden emotional outpour.

## **Empathy is a sign of strength**

Empathy is a key component of emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to identify and regulate your own emotions and to understand and manage the emotions of others.

According to psychologist Daniel Goleman, empathy is one of [five key](#) emotional intelligence characteristics, along with [self-awareness](#), self-regulation, motivation and social skills.

High emotional intelligence has [been shown](#) to be associated with

effective leadership, professional success and [academic achievement](#), as well as better social and [intimate relationships](#). It [is linked to](#) with psychological and [physical health](#) and well-being, and greater emotional intelligence helps to deal with stress and conflict.

Crying in response to a movie reveals high empathy, social awareness and connection—all aspects of emotional intelligence. As such, it is an indicator of [personal strength](#) rather than weakness.

Sobbing openly may be a particular sign of strength, as it shows that a person is unafraid to display their emotional reaction to others.

## **Crying is not a sign of weakness**

A reason why crying in movies has been viewed as a sign of emotional weakness is that crying, especially crying in response to the pain of others, is seen as a [stereotypically](#) female behavior.

Add in that oxytocin, and its relationship with empathy and social bonding, is strongly associated with child-bearing, and the crying = female = weak connection is established.

But there is nothing weak about demonstrating your emotional intelligence. Emotional crying is a [uniquely](#) human behavior. Good movies embed us in another world, eliciting powerful emotions and triggering biological processes in our brain.

Suddenly being awash in tears shows a strong [empathy](#) response. Blubber away and be proud of your emotional [intelligence](#)—and maybe search out tearjerker movies to check out the emotional response of your friends.

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