



## Boys Don't Cry.

Strategically positioned in the furthestmost corner of Gate 3's waiting area they sat side-by-side surveying the impatient crowd in perfect unity - matching desert fatigues, grey boots, sun glasses, clean shaven "high and tights" - a single duffle bag between them. Only one was travelling; he sat next to me on the plane. Turns out his name is Jake, and he stared rigidly out the window trying desperately to maintain his composure, clearly devastated that he was forced to leave his fellow warrior. Jake was being sent home after a raucous 12-day reunion just in time to resume his 3<sup>rd</sup> grade science fair project. His father was being deployed for the fourth time, an unfathomable reality for an eight year old; the only experience of war he understood was the last two years of his parents' failed marriage.

Jake told me about his beloved father, sharing stories of laughter, fish, marshmallows, go carts, smelly feet, snot, guns, and baseball. He also told me how he and his dad did not like going out to the movies or to church anymore - too many people - and that sometimes, most times, they had trouble sleeping so they just stayed up and watched a lot of DVDs together; they called it "snuggle time." Jake and his dad were known to smash things, scream and yell (especially at Jake's mom), and frequently were real quiet and just wanted to be left alone. These were very difficult times, and Jake was embarrassed to admit that sometimes he cried, but never in front of his dad. Jake confessed that no one but each other really understood just how different they felt from everyone else, and that is especially why Jake was going to miss his father.

I told Jake that he had three choices: **cry, sweat, or pee.**

Our bodies have to get rid of pain and the ways that they do it best are to cry it out, sweat it out, or pee it out; and that means that you have to drink lots and lots and lots of water. It is just a fact - that is the way human bodies take care of themselves. I explained that if we don't find ways to let that hurt out our bodies will get sick, something that Jake could relate to...tummy troubles, headaches, can't concentrate, angry all the time, not caring about anyone or anything unless he was with his dad, tired all the time, jumpy, afraid to go to sleep and have bad dreams, and crying - a lot - when no one else is around.

I also explained to Jake that I thought it was great that he and his dad smashed things, and yelled, and took quiet time. At first he thought I was kidding, but I let him know that by **completing a defensive response of fight, flight, freeze, or faint**, he and his dad were helping their bodies get better. The body needs to feel safe before it can really feel anything good. When we figure out safe, creative ways to let it do the things it wanted to do when the bad things were happening (but it couldn't do at the time because being afraid or backing down from a fight is not a warriors' option), the body releases that stuckness and slowly builds back trust that it is safe. Only then will it let good things come back into the heart, mind, and soul.

Jake and I brainstormed ways that a person could complete a defensive response without hurting themselves or others. **Fight:** punch (a punching bag), kick (a ball), yell (for your team at a baseball game), chop (wood), scream (at the moon), smash (pumpkins), push (ups), pound (bread dough), hit (baseballs at the batting cage). **Flight:** run, swim, bike, hike, skate, jog, skip, walk - your body doesn't realize it is starting and ending in the same place, it just registers that you are moving, "fleeing", "escaping". Freeze and Faint are a bit trickier, because that means that the body is so shocked it just doesn't know what to do, so it locks up; or it is so overwhelmed that it just plain falls out so it doesn't have to be awake as the terrible thing chews it's head off... So, Jake and I thought about ways to be still and quiet that don't involve being terrified: snuggle time, fishing, reading, drawing, listening to music, napping, praying, staying home and watching movies or lava lamps or goldfish swim or NASCAR - anything that lets the body feel still and quiet and safe.

As the flight continued Jake shared more stories about his adventures with his father, except this time he explained to *me* how the activities that they were doing could be ways to let the hurt out so there was room for the good to come back in. He quizzed me before we got off the plane: Cry. Sweat. Pee. Water, water, water. Complete a defensive response of fight, flight, freeze, or faint so the body can build back trust. And then I added one more before our time together was over: the four ways the body resets itself are **laughing, crying, exercise, and touch**. We pretty much already went over the crying, exercise, and touch/snuggle parts, but I wanted to make sure that Jake knew that it was OK for him to laugh - to be spontaneous, goofy and have fun - and not just when he was with his dad. Joy and laughter don't mean that we are disrespecting or forgetting the loss, pain, confusion, shame, rage - it just means that those tough feelings are only part of our experiences. Life is full of all kinds of adventures, sometimes good, sometimes not so good. Jake and I agreed that it is important to savor and celebrate the good times, and to take really, really good care of ourselves and our loved ones who are going through the not so good times - lessons on a plane that Jake was excited to share with his dad.

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