

Letting it Out in America: The Social Landscape for Expressing Emotions



Key Findings

Kleenex® Brand tissue and The Segmentation Company, a division of Yankelovich recently conducted a major national study to explore Americans' perceptions about emoting. The study, "Letting it Out in America: The Social Landscape for Expressing Emotions", was conducted through online interviews among a representative sample of American men and women over the age of 18. A total of 3,400 interviews (1,000 nationally; 2,400 in 12 cities) took place between Jan. 24 – Feb. 15, 2007. The margin of error for the national study is $\pm 3.1\%$.

"Letting it out" refers to expressing emotions more freely, and liberation from inhibitions, constraints and anxieties based on the truth that release feels better. The telling results reveal that Americans believe that expressing their emotions is healthy, although few do it often.

Only 15 percent of Americans admit to letting their feelings out often although 80 percent believe it's healthy to do so. Thirty six percent of Americans say they don't let it out often enough, and over half (56%) say others express emotions more than they do.

Through this research we better understand what people think about letting it out, and the surprising gap between people's knowledge that it's good to do and their actual behavior. Americans have a real need to become more comfortable with releasing their emotions and once they try it, they'll realize how much better they feel.

Why Let It Out? It's Good For You

The benefits of letting it out are clear. A majority of Americans believe that letting it out is good for their emotional (86%) and physical (83%) health. Yet only half (51%) say they let it out about the right amount. Perhaps they just need a little encouragement. The research found the tool needed most for someone to let it out is simple—another person. In fact, 73% seek support from someone else. People most often (66% of the time) express emotions with their significant other, followed by friends (45%). Common vehicles for letting it out include "at work" (33%), and "when writing an e-mail" (30%).

Across the Genders...

The sexes differ when it comes to outlets for emotional release as men (46%) seek solitude to let it out and a third (33%) work out/exercise. Women on the other hand more often cry (56%) and talk with friends (54%). Women are more likely to let it out over stress at work (52% vs. 46% of men) and spousal conflicts (53% vs. 46% of men). Men are six times more likely to let it out when their favorite sports team loses than women.

...And Across the Generations

Though Americans may not let it out as often as they should, they're making progress. Three-fourths (75%) of those surveyed agree that people are more likely to let it out now than they were 20 years ago, and seventy-six percent believe kids and teens let it out more than adults.

Perhaps most telling finding in generational differences is the fact that while 60 percent of young adults (18-34) believe those who let it out are happier, only 30 percent of adults over 50 agree. And, young adults are more reliant on others to help them let it out, such as a good friend (64%) or someone to listen (62%).

But...The Release is Working

Over the last three months, 63 percent of Americans reported feeling "in control," and 52 percent say they feel "full of confidence." Yet 30 percent are "stressed out" and nearly 1-in-7 (14%) are "full of bottled-up emotions." Our study reveals that Americans need to feel 'in control,' but at the same time, want to be more expressive.

When do Americans Let It Out?

America looks to a variety of ways to positively let it out. "Being on a vacation" (32%) and "getting together with close friends" (29%) are two top ways people choose to let it out. And why might they look to these activities for a little release? The most cited negative circumstances for letting it out include "pent up frustrations" (55%) and "stress at work" (49%).