

# The Complexity of Emotion

Reflections Upon Her Daughter's High School Graduation  
Brene Brown, PhD

Ellen graduated from high school this past weekend. It was beautiful and hard. Emotions are complex things. I've been studying the relationship between thought, behavior, and emotions for close to two decades, and I learned something new on Saturday morning.

There's a combination of joy and grief that can take your breath away. The sum of those two parts wells up inside you and holds your breath hostage until you let go of the notion that you can control the paradox and choose between joy and grief. Your breath returns only when you submit to the reality that you are caught in the grips of both delight and sorrow. Both are strong. Both are true.

In many ways, the etymology of the word "paradox" captures the heart of what it means to love. From its Greek origins, it's the joining of two words para (contrary to) and dokein (opinion). The Latin paradoxum means "seemingly absurd but really true."

That's how parenting has always felt to me - unbelievably true.

I've shared as many life lessons as I could with Ellen, AND she has always been my teacher. I've tried to model our family belief that it's okay to be brave and afraid at the same time, AND our children have always been the best example of what this looks like. We have a sign by our back door that reads, "We can do hard things." We hung it there to remind the kids that hard work, tough conversation, and emotional pain are normal and important parts of life. AND, it's Ellen who often whispers the saying in my ear when I doubt myself.

Sometimes she's afraid to leave for college in the fall, and I assure her that she's ready. Sometimes I'm fighting back tears, and she'll say, "I'm ready. It's going to be okay." Sometimes we cheer together. And sometimes we hold each other and weep.

Now the toughest paradox of love - letting go and holding on.

Ellen, it's time for you to fly. It's one of the biggest scary-and-brave moments, but don't worry - we'll be holding on tight. Not always to each other, but to love, courage, faith, gratitude, and strength. All of the things you'll need in the world. AND all of the things you already have.