



THE POWER OF LAUGHTER

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Laughter is one of the best emotional and physical therapies for anyone under stress. ***Laughing releases endorphins into the brain.*** Endorphins are like the nerve-numbing drug morphine and serve to reduce harmful chemicals in the body that are released by stress.

As you know first-hand, one of the best ways to increase comfort in negative situations is to break the ice with laughter. When everyone is thinking the worst or feeling anxious about a situation, laughter can dissipate the tension just enough to give everyone a more manageable perspective on an issue.

Of course, serious issues deserve a focused approach. But whenever laughter can be introduced, the resulting release in tension can be a tremendous opportunity to lift above the doom and gloom so we can clarify our minds. We can then think more effectively about solutions for the problem at hand.

LAUGHTER IS GOOD FOR YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH

When we think of caring for our health, we tend to think about the quality of our diets and whether or not we exercise, but those are not the *only* things that are good for you!

The act of laughing can cause beneficial physical changes to your body. In addition to relieving stress, laughter gives you a renewed boost of energy and relieves minor pains.

Releasing stress also immediately puts you in a better mood and improves your attitude so you can feel ready to tackle tough situations.

A friend has a teenage daughter who recently went through cancer treatment. She told me that, when they were in the hospital for weeks at a time, the best way for both of them to relieve their stress was to find the funniest (or dumbest) movies on television and just laugh until they cried.

Their laughter helped them forget temporarily where they were; it joined them together because it's something they shared; and it relaxed both of their bodies enough so they could rest for a few hours.

Certainly the cancer drugs were what helped her daughter win back her health, but the laughter acted as a type of natural medicine that helped soothe the stress of the situation.

Here are some additional health benefits of laughter:

- 1. Laughter relaxes the whole body.** You can relieve stress and relax your body and muscles for up to an hour.
- 2. Laughter boosts the immune system.** Believe it or not, laughter can increase your immunity which helps you fight off disease.
- 3. Laughter signals the release of endorphins,** the natural chemical that helps us feel good. Endorphins can also relieve minor pain temporarily.
- 4. Laughter improves blood circulation.** Good hearty laughs on a regular basis help improve the blood flow through your body and strengthen your heart function.

LAUGHTER IMPROVES YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Have you ever been walking through the mall or in a parking lot when a complete stranger gave you a smile? Just that little bit of shared happiness can help lift a bad mood and improve your self-esteem.

The same is true for laughter. In a difficult situation, a sense of humor can help you keep a positive outlook. Laughing can also help clear your head so you can find a resolution to any problem that challenges you.

When faced with the loss of a loved one, you can still reflect on the joyful moments of their life. Try to remember the funny anecdotes about your loved one, jokes they might have told, or their silly quirks that always made you smile. Doing so can help relieve some of the grief and despair.

Here are some additional mental health benefits of laughter:

1. **Laughter relieves sad or distressing emotions.** You can't feel anxious, angry, or sad when you're in the midst of a deep belly laugh.
2. **Laughter relaxes your mind and recharges your energy.** A good laugh can reduce your stress, increase your energy, and help you stay focused on the task at hand.
3. **Laughter improves your problem solving skills.** It can help you see another perspective of an issue, thus allowing you to strategize different ways to solve the problem.

LAUGHTER STRENGTHENS RELATIONSHIPS

Laughter has a way of joining friends or family members together. Think of your closest relationships. What were the most memorable moments together? Probably the times when you were giggling at a prank or laughing at a witty joke together.

Sharing laughter adds joyfulness to any relationship. When you share funny stories, memories, or jokes together, it's unitive, especially during difficult or stressful times.

Think about a child who is mad about something. They usually stand in front of you, arms crossed, lips pouting, maybe stomping their feet in disagreement. Maybe the bottom lip quivers a bit, leading up to a cry.

Quick-acting parents will often tickle the upset child, tell a silly joke, or make a funny face before the waterworks start. Most times the quivering lip turns into a reluctant smile, and the now-smiling child will pretend to be mad after having their mood changed.

Many adults can have their moods changed just as quickly (minus the tickling) just by invoking some humor into the situation.

Using humor and laughter in relationships allows you to:

1. **Be carefree and spontaneous.** Everything in life seems great when you can laugh about it.

2. **Let go of judgments, doubts, and criticisms.** Laughing puts you in a more positive frame of mind, which will then allow you to see the good in everything.
3. **Release resentment.** The fears or resentment that cause you to hold back are replaced with love and respect.
4. **Express your true feelings.** It's much easier to approach difficult conversations when both parties are in good spirits.

LAUGHTER AT WORK

Laughter at work is a wonderful thing! A little laughter can go a long way in making people more productive and friendly to one another.

When co-workers take a moment from their duties to smile or laugh together, studies show that it can lead to:

- Fewer sick days
- Increased sales and productivity
- A healthier working environment

Especially when the workload is extremely heavy or the challenges are great because of cutbacks, layoffs, or restructuring, laughter can be very beneficial.

When staff members are dealing with great stress due to increased workloads or impending layoffs, a hearty opportunity to laugh and share some funny news can be just the kind of “*therapy*” the organization needs.

When employees are working back-to-back shifts or hours at a tedious task, employers can often realize better productivity if they have breaks that are interspersed with tea time, laughter, and discussion.

Here are some ideas for bringing laughter into your workplace:

1. **Schedule a team luncheon after the end of a stressful project.** Reward your team for their efforts and fill the luncheon with funny stories or jokes. This is not the time to berate other team players or discuss ways to make things better in the office.
2. **Wear a quirky hat or costume to get people talking and laughing.** Are you someone who loves a good joke and likes to be the center of attention? Give your team something to laugh about today.

LAUGHTER AT HOME

Laughing at home is a wonderful way to bring a family closer together. Usually families are most relaxed at home, and a good healthy dose of laughter while sharing the day's adventures can help relieve stress and dispel any bad feelings among family members.

Sharing laughter is a way to have something in common with someone we care about. All families go through periods of stress from time to time and, at those times, laughter can be a tremendous stress reliever.

Laughter with your family can be a unifying and therapeutic activity, especially if there has been tension in the relationships. Forgiveness and a stronger sense of connection are just some of the positive feelings that come from enjoying a nice chuckle with your family.

There are times when you can use laughter to ease the tension in an uncomfortable situation while building family unity, such as:

- Your child breaks one of a vase while showing you a new dance step she learned at school today.
- Your husband brings home a beautiful gift for your birthday... but it's not your birthday.
- Your brother-in-law tries so hard to impress you at dinner by complimenting you on your food that he gets your name completely wrong.

The examples listed above suggest that there are more important things in life than petty grievances over broken objects or mispronounced names. When tension builds because of these issues, nothing can dissipate that tension quicker than a good laugh.

Try these suggestions to bring more laughter into your home:

1. **Keep a joke book in the car.** Instead of cursing the traffic, have the kids thumb through the joke book so you can share a good laugh.
2. **Sing karaoke.** Turn on your favorite radio station, grab your hairbrush for a microphone (just like when you were a kid!) and sing your heart out. Let your kids be the judges and give you a score. Add some dance moves from when you were a kid and see the tears roll down their faces from laughing so hard!

LAUGHTER WITH FRIENDS

One of the ways that we feel connected with some of our dearest friends is through the sharing of ridiculously funny experiences that define our relationships.

Laughter also helps create new friendships. Have you ever had a preconceived notion about someone, only to have that turned upside down as you and the person broke out laughing together over the same joke?

When we laugh with old friends, we renew and strengthen our bonds. Have you ever connected with someone from your past and it seemed as though you had never lost touch? ***Sharing a common bond and laughing about mutual stories can help to restore a dormant friendship.***

Laughing with good friends can also be liberating. With a circle of friends in your vicinity, you can feel comfortable that your hearty stomach-wrenching laughter will be shared by all!

Try these ways to enjoy a good laugh with your friends:

1. **Leave the kids at home and go out.** Have a family member or babysitter take care of the kids for the night and treat yourself to drinks, dinner, appetizers, or dessert, while you connect with your friends.
2. **Invite your friends to a house party.** Have your friends come over with a favorite food to share. Or host a catalog party where it's half socializing and half shopping.
3. **Start a game night.** This can also work wonders with your family, but can be funnier when playing adult-themed games.

LAUGHTER WHILE NETWORKING

Trying to break the ice at a networking event can be difficult. People are nervous because they don't know one another and they're concerned with making a good impression for potential friends, business partners, or customers.

If you're the host of a networking event, it would be a good idea to build in some ice-breaking activities that will put people at ease. After all, when people laugh together, they're more inclined to take steps to get to know one another better.

Of course, beware that your jokes aren't offensive. You also don't want to try *too* hard to be funny. ***Working too hard may make things uncomfortable for others.***

SUMMARY

A good ol' fashioned chuckle is an easy and cost-free way to relieve tension.

Laughter can help make difficult family or work situations more bearable.

If you're using laughter to break the ice for guests, be wary of their comfort level. Select one or two games where big laughter occurs, but don't be too adamant about creating a big laugh every time.

If you have tender relations at home, think about using laughter to set the mood before attempting to talk about more serious issues. Laughter won't make problems disappear, but it can soften the mood, which can lead to more open communication.

Get in the habit of laughing more often! Use these tips as suggestions to get you started and you'll soon be finding more and more ways to enjoy your life!