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## Laughter Is Really Good Medicine

Laughter and humor are two powerful tools, helping people cope and get through threatening situations. Looking at life's situations with a sense of humor and laughter provides perspective and helps keep things in balance when life seems unfair. Humor and laughter are a source of power, healing, and survival. We often forget this when caught up in the troubles and trauma of life. Bill Cosby says, "If you can find humor in anything, you can survive it."



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## What You Get When You Laugh

While we are working at surviving, laughter can help us to maintain our perspective. The next time you feel like you're losing control, allow yourself a little "humor time." If you can find what's funny in a situation, your upsets might not seem as important as they once did.

### **Humor gives a sense of power.**

There are many things in life that we have no control over and can't change. As long as we have a sense of humor, however, we can do something--such as minimize the hold that upsets have over us. Humor has the power to turn any situation around.

### **Humor helps us cope.**

A lot of the suffering and troubles we experience are not a result of our difficulties, but how we view them. Gail Sheehy notes in her best seller, *Pathfinders*, that the ability to see humor in a situation was one of the four coping devices that "pathfinders," people who overcome life's crises, used as a protection against change and uncertainty. Using humor in difficult times can be one of the smartest ways of coping with them, easing our worries, and getting on with life.

### **Humor helps establish communication and rapport.**

Laughter knows no cultural boundaries. You don't have to speak the same language to laugh together. Laughter also helps break the ice when you're in a group. It is the one form of communication to which everyone can relate.

### **Humor relieves tension.**

We all know the relief we feel when someone in a group makes a funny comment during a tense situation.

Humor dispels anger and aggression in ourselves and others.

It helps to use humor when dealing with an angry child. A study of humor in the classroom showed lower scores on aggression for students viewing a humorous videotape.

### **Humor increases learning and retention.**

Laughing stimulates both sides of the brain. People get the message quicker and remember it longer.

### **Humor can be used as "diagnostic tool."**

If we listen carefully to a person's humor, it can help us realize his or her fears and worries. When a person jokes around, he or she may be indirectly telling us about the things that are bothering him or her.

Humor is an important, often overlooked tool. The better adjusted you are and the more satisfying your lifestyle, the more readily you will respond to the humor in jokes, cartoons, and everyday situations. Be aware of taking yourself too seriously. It is important to learn to laugh at yourself.

You can learn to share your laughter and help make others laugh. This doesn't mean telling jokes unless that is one of your talents. It means beginning to share your humorous perspective and giving others permission to do the same. A good sense of humor is something everyone can work on. It doesn't just happen.

Here are some suggestions to help add more laughter to your life:

- Recognize the value of humor.
- Don't worry or analyze why people laugh--just participate.
- Think funny--look for the humor in every situation. Learn to laugh at the incongruities in life.
- Keep a notebook of funny things and write in it daily.
- Adapt material. Use humor from any source. Personalize it and change it to suit your situation or the problem at hand.

Remember that laughter not only makes you feel better, but the use of humor can be a major tool for insight. George Burns says it best: "You can't help getting older, but you can help getting old. Chronologically, the clock is going to keep on ticking for all of us, but if we take a lick of humor, we can prevent a hardening of the attitudes. If we savor humor, humor can be a lifesaver."

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