

FINDING HUMOR (HUMOUR)

By

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*"Warning: Humor may be hazardous to your illness."
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Humor refers to our human ability to perceive and express a sense of the clever or amusing:

What is the astronaut's favorite place on the computer?

The space bar

Humor consists principally in the recognition and expression of incongruities or peculiarities present in a situation or character:

"A fool and his money are soon elected." ([Will Rogers](#))

Humor is frequently used to illustrate some fundamental absurdity in human nature or conduct:

"Remember: Marriage is the number one cause of divorce." ([Red Skelton](#))

People who laugh a lot usually have a positive attitude and the ability to find humor even when things are not going well. Because they are fun to be around, others gravitate toward them and they generally have a strong social network that benefits them and everyone with whom they interact.

Understanding humor requires thinking flexibly—finding novel relationships, observing oddities in images, and making analogies. People who engage in humor can see situations from a new vantage point or come up with the unexpected. For example, a student asks another, “is it time yet for us to eat?” Response, “No”. Student asks in another 3 seconds, “how about now?” The immediacy of the response and the surprising shift from accepting the answer comes as a surprise. They both laugh. They also are managing their impulsivity as they wait for meal time.

People are often seen as having a “sunny” disposition because they can initiate humor more often. They tend to place greater value on having a sense of humor, to appreciate and understand others' humor and to be verbally playful when interacting with others. Having a whimsical frame of mind, they thrive on finding incongruity and perceiving absurdities, ironies and satire; finding discontinuities and being able to laugh at situations and themselves. They poke fun of themselves and others with a sensitivity to the other's feelings.

Abraham Lincoln is quoted as saying, “A good laugh is good for both the mental and physical digestion.” While he may not have had the medical, neuroscientific and psychological research to draw on at that time, now we know that laughter alters brain functioning and boosts production of dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with the brain's reward and “feel good” system. It reduces cortisol, the brain's stress hormone, and may even improve memory. According to James J. Walsh, MD., people who laugh actually live longer than those who don't laugh. Few people realize that health actually varies according to the

amount of laughter. Laughter does more than make you feel good, A hearty belly-laugh has many of the same physiological effects as exercise: laughter reduces arterial wall stiffness , increases pulse, blood pressure and respiratory rate. It oxygenates the brain as well as delivers oxygen throughout the body. It stimulates release of nitric oxide, which, enhances blood flow and reduces inflammation. Vigorous sustained laughter even burns calories!

So, keep your brain active by finding the humor in situations –especially when you are needing some relief from stress or frustration.

Walsh, J. J. (1928) *Laughter and Health*. New York: D. Appleton and Company,