

# The Importance of Humor & Laughter in Education

**EVERY  
GREAT DAY HAS  
LAUGHTER  
IN ITS HEART**



**Cristal McGill, Ph.D.**  
[www.engagingmindsnow.com](http://www.engagingmindsnow.com)  
[Cristal@EngagingMindsNow.com](mailto:Cristal@EngagingMindsNow.com)



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## Why humor and laughter should be a part of every activity or group experience!

“Through humor, you can soften some of the worst blows that life delivers. And once you find laughter, no matter how painful your situation might be, you can survive it.”

Bill Cosby



### 1. Humor makes a group more interesting.

Humor can relieve the monotony and boredom that sometimes accompanies dry content, helping students stay engaged. Humor is a motivator. It helps bring students to class and it helps keep students coming back.

### 2. Humor helps both students and facilitator enjoy a group more.

Students who enjoy class are more likely to be motivated and actively participate. Win – Win for both the students and the teachers.

### 3. Laughter reduces tension and anxiety.

Humor disarms – it can diffuse awkward, tense and even potential verbal abuse. Helping students deal with hostile and aggressive feelings can reduce the anxiety and stress of demands and complex emotional relationships.

### 4. Humor motivates and energizes.

Humor can act as an encourager to put more effort into class and assignments. Energy and can be both stimulating and infectious.

### 5. Humor gives students a 'hook' on which to trigger recall.

When we learn, we link new information with old information.

### 6. Humor encourages creativity.

Humor increases options and avenues to new perspectives. It opens up minds, freeing restricted thoughts and fixed mindsets.

### 7. Humor helps students accept new ideas.

Since new ideas can be threatening, humor can open ones up to receiving new information.

### 8. Laughter helps build relationships.

Laughter brings people together, both physically and psychologically. It fosters friendships and promotes positive sense of belonging

### 9. Humor provokes thought

Just the act and figuring out a joke can stimulate cognitive development and critical thought.

### 10. Laughter improves health, for both students and group leaders.

Humor and laughter reduces stress, blood pressure and has been cited for increasing the immune system.

### 11. Laughter feels good.

Laughter gives us pleasure. Strategic use can only help quell the multiple pressures facing teachers and students everyday.

“A sense of humor... is needed armor. Joy in one's heart and some laughter on one's lips is a sign that the person down deep has a pretty good grasp of life.”

Hugh Sidey

## **Social Benefits**

Among both children and adults, humor is now understood to be one basic component of interpersonal competence. It is a key social skill that will serve children well in the work world and in interpersonal relationships. Children who initiate humor have been found to show more social participation in activities; they also tend to be judged by their peers as being more sociable.

This is true from the preschool years on through high school and into adulthood. Children who know how to use humor in social interaction are better at putting others at ease. This creates an environment in which all communication is easier, an enormous benefit at all stages of life.

Children who initiate humor tend to be popular and have more friends. Humor provides children with a socially acceptable means of expressing anger. This enhances the skills of handling of conflicts in social situations throughout the developmental years into adulthood.

## **Emotional Benefits**

A great deal of attention has been given in the past decade or so to emotional intelligence as form of intelligence, which has long been neglected. The ability to manage one's own emotional state (as well as the emotions of others) is considered by virtually all of the major researchers/experts on this topic to be a key component of emotional intelligence.

There is ample research showing that humor is a very effective means of managing one's emotions of sustaining a more positive, upbeat mood and attitude on the tough days as well as on the good days. When you see young children playing, you generally see them laughing. This laughter is a reflection of the joy and happiness that humor and play provide, but we now know that laughter can also help generate a joyous and happy state where there was none before.

Nurturing children's sense of humor helps them gain a measure of control of their daily mood. When children are in a good mood, it's easier to sustain a good mood. Good humor skills during childhood help build a solid sense of self-esteem. Since humor and shared laughter help the child receive a lot of positive feedback from other kids (and adults), this gradually builds a strong sense of good feeling about oneself.

Perhaps the most important long-range emotional benefit of humor resulting from the development of good humor skills during childhood is the coping skill known to be associated with humor. There is a large body of research documenting humor's power in helping adults and adolescents cope with life stress. Kids who build this skill early on are able to benefit from this coping advantage throughout their life.

Paul E. McGhee, PhD, [www.LaughterRemedy.com](http://www.LaughterRemedy.com)

## **The many benefits of laughter**

1. When you make fun of yourself, you disarm those who would make fun of you and defuse possible confrontations.
2. Laughter relieves tension, stress, anger, irritation, grief, and depression. Similar to crying, laughter lowers emotional barriers, allowing the release of pent-up emotions. After a hearty session of laughter, you experience a sense of true well-being.
3. Medical researchers have found that laughter boosts the immune system.
4. Laughter reduces pain by releasing endorphins that are more powerful than equivalent amounts of morphine.
5. Humor helps merge the 2 hemispheres of the brain. The left hemisphere is used to interpret the verbal content of a joke. The right hemisphere interprets whether it is funny or not.
6. Laughter adds spice to life. Laughter is to life what rain is to the earth.
7. When you develop your sense of humor, you become more productive, communicate better, and tend to be a better team player.
8. Laughter provides the balance we need to get through the many hurdles of life.
9. Laughter is another form of exercise. it massages all the organs of the body according to Dr. James Walsh.
10. Laughter/humor helps you to rise to any challenge and handle the unexpected with ease.

***So go ahead and laugh yourself healthier, or the joke is on you!***

# Humor quiz

## Take this quiz to find out how your 'sense of humor' rates

Select your answers from the following options:

- if never = 1
- almost never = 2
- seldom = 3
- sometimes = 4
- often = 5
- almost always = 6
- always = 7

Answer each question and remember, there are no right or wrong answers. This is just a guideline to give you a base to work from. Be honest with yourself; don't dwell on any question.

Make sure you select an answer for ALL the questions!

1. I have a lot of laughs
2. I have a lot of fun\_\_\_\_
3. I laugh at my own mistakes\_\_\_\_
4. I think happy and fun thoughts\_\_\_\_
5. I am spontaneous\_\_\_\_
6. I like to hear and tell jokes\_\_\_\_
7. I take myself lightly at work\_\_\_\_
8. I like to watch and read humorous material\_\_\_\_
9. I take responsibility for my happiness\_\_\_\_
10. I consider others feelings before I attempt any humor\_\_\_\_
11. I surround myself with positive people\_\_\_\_
12. I plan time to play\_\_\_\_
13. I avoid offending people with my humor\_\_\_\_
14. I like to hear and tell 'funny' life and work experiences\_\_\_\_
15. I use my sense of humor to deal with difficult situations\_\_\_\_
16. I don't mind acting silly once in a while\_\_\_\_
17. I look forward to, and take regular vacations\_\_\_\_
18. I call a 'humor buddy' when I am in a 'down mood'\_\_\_\_
19. I use humor to deal with stress\_\_\_\_
20. I believe that laughing and humor are good for my health\_\_\_\_

**Quiz total** - total up your points scored\_\_\_\_\_

**If you score between 115 - 140** you have an excellent sense of humor and attitude. You may not realize it, but you are a humor advocate and positively influence others with your humor.

**If you score between 85 - 114** you have an average and healthy sense of humor.

**If you score between 50 -84** you have a fair sense of humor. You are a little 'humor impaired' and can do with priming your sense of humor a notch or two.

**If you score between 25 - 49** you are definitely 'humor impaired' and need to give this deficiency some very serious consideration.

**If you score 24 or less** you suffer from chronic 'seriousitis' and are in need of a dramatic 'humor infusion'.

Increasingly more studies indicate that happiness is caused from within us. The exact causes however are very much a personal issue and dependent on genetics, and association with like-minded people.

Research by Sonya Lyubornisky, professor of psychology at the University of California, Riverside, indicates that approximately 50% of how happy we are is due to genetics. Another 10% is attributed to life experiences, such as health, prosperity and relationship status in life.

The balance, or approximately 40% is due to behavior and therefore within our ability to add to, or enhance.

Professor Lyubornisky maintains that happy people share certain traits. They value and nurture relationships with friends and relatives. They tend to be caring and helpful with respect to others. and they tend to be more active physically, will exercise and remain fit.

Kirk Wilkinson is the author of the bestselling book, 'The Happiness Factor - How to be happy no Matter what!'

# The Negative Side of Humor i.e., Sarcasm and/or Put-Down Jokes

*"If there is no malice in your heart, there can't be none in your jokes"*  
 Will Rogers

Appropriately timed humor in the class has the power to break down barriers between fellow students and build positive connections or bonds in their place. Shared positive laughter promotes community and helps students communicate more openly and honestly. It supports the leaning by helping us sustain peak levels of performance with an increasing pace of change, and the inevitable stress that comes with learning.

We've all seen situations, however, where humor alienates students and creates barriers. The problem here, of course, is the kind of humor that disrupts and weakens is generally some kind of put-down humor in which there is a clear victim or butt of the joke. This kind of humor always feels like "laughing at" rather than "laughing with."

It seems to be part of human nature to tell jokes, which poke fun at others. If you know a lot of jokes that poke fun at other racial or ethnic groups, the opposite sex, etc., and tell them in the class, it's just a matter of time until you seriously offend someone (even if they laugh at your joke). With increasing levels of cultural diversity emerging in most class settings, the best rule of thumb is to simply not tell any put-down jokes in the classroom or among fellow teachers. A joke that you assume will not be offensive can easily insult someone within earshot of the joke, even though you're not telling it to that person.

Those who love put-down jokes complain that people are too sensitive, and that those who are offended by their jokes need to "lighten up" a bit.

The joke-teller generally says something like, "Hey, it's just a joke. I was only kidding. What's the matter, can't you take a joke?" *The problem is that one can never be sure whether the joke does or does not say something about one's true underlying attitudes about the opposite sex or another racial or ethnic group.* There are people who do hold hostile attitudes toward the groups they put down in their jokes. This type of sarcasm and or joke telling does not benefit anyone. In fact, it alienates people. Since this can only disrupt the effectiveness ones ability to teach the best approach is clearly to find another way to show your sense of humor with your students and colleagues.

Sarcasm and/or off-color comments inhibit a relationship from even beginning.



<u>DESTRUCTIVE Humor...</u>	<u>CONSTRUCTIVE Humor...</u>
Lowers Self-esteem	Raises Self-esteem
Belittles Someone	Is Supportive
Excludes Someone	Includes People
Creates Tension	Reduces Tension
Stimulates Laughter at Someone	Stimulates Laughter with someone
Perpetuates A Stereotype	Confronts Stereotyping Ideas
Creates Barriers	Breaks Down Barriers
Creates Defensiveness	Relaxes People
Closes Off Creative Thought	Stimulates New Ideas
Focuses On Negatives	Creates A Positive Atmosphere And Energy