Laughter is the Best Medicine: Healing Through Humor

New York State Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services
NYAPRS is a change agent dedicated to improving services, public policies and social conditions for people with mental health, substance use and trauma-related challenges, by promoting health, wellness and recovery, with full community inclusion, so that all may achieve maximum potential in communities of choice.

Advocate, Educate, Innovate & Celebrate
Your Presenter’s for today:

Robert Statham, CESP, Training & Technical Assistance Facilitator

&

David Ferencz- Training & Technical Assistance Facilitator

New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services

I know what you’re thinking...
Yes, we were much younger in that picture!

Nevertheless...
• Experienced in fields of Mental Health Recovery, Supported Employment, and Successful Engagement Practices.

• Worked in the OPWDD field as a Training & Organizational Development Specialist

• Recipient of Rochester Area Employment Network Job Developer of the Year

• Experience working in the fields of Paralegal Services, Hotel/Motel Management, Volunteer Coordination, and Recruitment

• Earned Bachelors degree in Community & Human Services

• Former Boy Band member
David Ferencz

I am human and consider nothing human alien to me.

Publius Terentius Afer

• Worked on the New Choices in Recovery Education Initiative, educating individuals with mental health and addiction issues on HARP, Health Homes and HCBS (2017-2020)

• Has done trainings in personal and psychological wellness, spirituality and meditation, gender and sexuality issues, group dynamics and financial stability

• Works as a counselor to a diverse population, including individuals in the autism, mental health/addiction and LGBTQ communities.

• Bachelor of Arts degree from Duquesne University

• Trained as a Counselor by Margaret Picha, director of the Wellsprings Renewal Center in Glens Falls, NY.

• I have also worked as a dog trainer, choir director and bellhop.
Discuss why McDonald’s stopped counting after 100 billion were served?

Examine data that suggests we don’t know what we are talking about.

Review ways in which we can lower our cable bills?
Today’s Humorless Goals

• Discuss what humor is and its benefits
• Look at Incorporating humor in a helping relationship. Identifying when and when not to utilize humor in the relationship.
• Review humor strategies and exercises
Definition of Humor

• **a**: that quality which appeals to a sense of the [ludicrous](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ludicrous) or absurdly incongruous: a funny or amusing quality

• **b**: the mental faculty of discovering, expressing, or appreciating the ludicrous or absurdly incongruous:

• **c**: something that is or is designed to be comical or amusing

https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humor
When you laugh, your mind, body, and spirit change”

Mark Twain
Benefits of humor on our mental health

- Reduces stress, depression, anxiety and fear.
- Increases energy and can help us perform activities that we might otherwise avoid.
- Laughter, like a smile, is the shortest distance between two people. It makes people feel closer to each other.
- A healthy sense of humor is related to being able to laugh at oneself and a way of accepting oneself.
- When people laugh together, they feel bonded and can better go through hardship together
- Elevates mood.

https://www.zurinstitute.com/clinical-updates/humor-in-therapy/
Benefits in the therapeutic relationship

- Enhances therapeutic alliance and increases trust between therapists and people they support.
- Humor can help participants thought processes by helping them to get unstuck.
- Helps Individuals cope with difficult situations, such as death and illness.
- Helps Individuals accept themselves.
- Laughter shifts perspective, allowing people to see situations in a more realistic, less threatening light.

https://www.zurinstitute.com/clinical-updates/humor-in-therapy/
Humor, (as well as pets), can affect your brain chemistry.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzKaOp383vA
Laughter may also confer medical health benefits. For the past forty years, studies have shown that good, hearty laughter can relieve tension and stress; boost the immune system, by reducing stress hormones and increasing activity among immune cells and antibodies; and help reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke, by improving blood flow and blood vessel function. Laughter and humor can be a tonic for the brain, as well. Triggering the brain’s emotional and reward centers spurs the release of dopamine, helping the brain to process emotional responses and enhancing our experience of pleasure; of serotonin, to buoy our mood; and of endorphins, to regulate our pain and stress and to induce euphoria.

the Harvard Mahoney neuroscience institute letter Spring 2010 Vol. 16, No. 2
Health Benefits of Humor

- Increases heart and respiratory rates. After these initial changes, a person moves into a state of relaxation.
- Lowers levels of the stress hormone, cortisol.
- Laughing more means lower heart attack risk.
- A study found that laughter therapy effectively delays cardiovascular complications of type 2 diabetes.
- Watching a funny movie decreased bronchial responsiveness in people with asthma.
- Watching a humorous movie led to improvements in cognitive function, including learning ability, delayed recall, and visual recognition in study that included 30 older adults.

Bennett MP, Lengacher C. Humor and laughter may influence health IV. Humor and immune function. Evid Based Complement Alternat Med. 2009;6(2):159-164.

I am free of all prejudice. I hate everyone equally.

WC Fields
Proposed links between humor and positive wellbeing are intuitive, as it makes sense that those with a good sense of humor will be in a better position to weather difficult situations; to enjoy more cohesive relationships; to find humor in all sorts of experiences, and to benefit from more positive mental and physical health (Martin, 2019). These ideas are supported by empirical research, and here are several examples:

- Engaging in a humor exercise is associated with a positive mood (Edwards, 2013) and positive cognitive appraisals (Maiolino & Kuiper, 2016).
- A sense of humor is associated with increased life satisfaction and a pleasurable and engaged life (Ruch, Proyer & Weber, 2010).
- Humor has been reported as among the top eight of 24 character strengths and is associated with increased life satisfaction, life engagement, and life pleasure (Samson & Antonelli, 2013).
- Adaptive humor is linked with increased stable positive mood and decreased stable negative mood (Cann & Collette, 2014).
The Many Forms of Humor

- **Irony**—the speaker expresses a statement in which the literal meaning is opposite to the intended meaning (e.g., saying “What a beautiful day!” when the weather is cold and stormy).

- **Satire**—aggressive humor that pokes fun at social institutions or social policy.

- **Sarcasm**—aggressive humor that targets an individual rather than an institution.

- **Overstatement and understatement**—changing the meaning of something another person has said by repeating it with a different emphasis.

- **Self-deprecation**—humorous remarks targeting oneself as the object of humor. This may be done to demonstrate modesty, to put the listener at ease, or to ingratiate oneself with the listener.

- **Teasing**—humorous remarks directed at the listener’s personal appearance or foibles. Unlike sarcasm, the intention is not to seriously insult or offend.
**Replies to rhetorical questions**—because rhetorical questions are not asked with the expectation of a reply, giving an answer to one violates a conversational expectation and surprises the person who posed the question. This can therefore be perceived as funny, and the intention is usually to simply entertain a conversational partner.

**Clever replies to serious statements**—clever, incongruous, or nonsensical replies to a statement or question that was meant to be serious. The statement is deliberately misconstrued so that the speaker replies to a meaning other than the intended one.

**Double entendres**—a statement or word is deliberately misperceived or misconstrued so as to evoke a dual meaning, which is often sexual in nature.

**Transformations of frozen expressions**—transforming well-known sayings, clichés, or adages into novel statements (e.g., complaint of a bald man: “Hair today, gone tomorrow”).

**Puns**—humorous use of a word that evokes a second meaning, usually based on a homophone (i.e., a word with a different meaning that sounds the same).
How to encourage humor in ourselves and those we work with.

- Learn what makes you and others laugh
- Understand your audience
- Know the rules and boundaries
- Look for the joy in life
- Adapt other people’s material
- Look to place people at ease
- Write down the “funny” moments at work
- Laugh at yourself
- Place laughter quotes on a bulletin board
- Start a joke jar
- Try laughter meditation
- Smile
Funny Signs!

A little office humor

purple marker missing!

Please return it ASAP!

NO!!!
Funny Signs!

Coffee Maker
not HOT

But has a
great personality.
Funny Signs!

This printer is here temporarily

In the greater scheme of things, aren't we all?
Funny Signs!

!!!WARNING!!!

MACHINE IS EATING DIMES AND QUARENTS

NO CREDIT.....

Your quarters and dimes were delicious...

-TheMachine
Funny Cartoons!
We had to cancel your appointment because you haven’t finished filling out your forms and we’re closing now!
Funny Cartoons!

I was flabbergasted when my wife said she was leaving me and taking the kids with her. I had no idea I had kids.
I am on paid leave right now for two weeks. When I get back, I will be on paid return. Upon completing my one week of paid return, I will address any issues or questions you have at a pace I am comfortable with. This is most likely a pace that you will not be comfortable with.

I’m not in the office right now, but if it’s important; tweet me using #InterruptYourVacation..

I will be unable to delete all the unread, worthless emails you send me until I return from holiday on [DATE]. Please be patient and your mail will be deleted in the order it was received.

I am out of order until further notice.
To be or not to be---funny!

- Use humor to lift other’s up, not bring them down
- Sarcasm is not a license to belittle someone
- Bad humor is not an acceptable excuse for bad behavior (Racist, Sexist, ageist and other discriminatory actions)
- Nor is inappropriate humor acceptable and must be gauged for the person/audience/situation i.e. Why Couldn’t they play cards on Noah’s Ark? Rodney Dangerfield’s wife and many others that you are thinking about right now!
Humor is Subjective

- It is influenced by age, gender, education, culture, spirituality, life-status etc. AND society and the times we live----things that were funny may not be anymore, and things that weren’t amusing, might be considered comedy today.

TRY SEARCHING “FUNNIEST VIDEO EVER” TO SEE JUST HOW SUBJECTIVE IT IS! WOW---violent, nasty, homophobic---some people’s funniest videos could be used in videos for what not to do in cultural competency, examples of microaggressions, domestic violence and intolerance.

- And this isn’t taking into account what most would consider inappropriate humor
• **Three funny things**: At the end of each day, write down the 3 funniest things you experienced that day. Describe the feelings during each experience.

• **Count funny things**: As each day progresses, keep track of all the funny things that happen. Briefly jot down each one so that you can get a total at the end of each day.

• **Applying humor**: Notice humorous things that happen during a typical day and add new humorous activities. You might include watching a comedy movie or sitcom, talking with your funniest friend on the phone, looking up funny things on the Internet, or reading comics or jokes.
Strategies and Exercises

• **Collecting funny things**: Recall one of the funniest things you experienced in the past (recent past or distant past) and write the memory down in as much detail as you can.

• **Resolving stress with humor**: Think about a stressful experience from your day. Write about how it was - or could have been - resolved in a funny and humorous way.

Question for Discussion

How can you imagine incorporating humor/laughter into your practice?
So, before you go back to work...

1. WHEN THE ALARM GOES OFF
Laughter is the most inexpensive and most effective wonder drug. Laughter is a universal medicine.

Bertrand Russell

A good laugh heals a lot of hurts.

Madeleine L’Engle

I have not seen anyone dying of laughter, but I know millions who are dying because they are not laughing.

Dr. Madan Kataria
BUT I HAVE ONE MORE QUESTION.
• [https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humor](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humor)
• [https://www.zurinstitute.com/clinical-updates/humor-in-therapy](https://www.zurinstitute.com/clinical-updates/humor-in-therapy)
• Hindawi Publishing Corporation Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine Volume 2011, Article ID 342837, 8 pages doi:10.1093/ecam/nep106
• [https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1063&context=edissertations_sp2 A TWO-PAPER EXAMINATION ON THE INTEGRATION OF HUMOR INTO CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK -Stephanie Nathanson](https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1063&context=edissertations_sp2)
• the Harvard Mahoney neuroscience institute letter Spring 2010 Vol. 16, No. 2
• Heather S. Lonczak, Ph.D. 0 01-09-2020, University of Washington, Positive Psychology.com
• Bennett MP, Lengacher C. Humor and laughter may influence health IV. Humor and immune function. Evid Based Complement Alternat Med. 2009;6(2):159-164.
Resources

- Introduction to the Psychology of Humor- First Edition - Janet M. Gibson The Many Forms of Humor
- University of Kentucky-Carol Whipple, MS Former Extension Specialist for Social Work – May 2008 revised January 2018
- Paul Osincup, AMA Journal of Ethics July 2020 How to Use Humor in Clinical Settings