

# Laugh It Off!

## How Therapeutic Humor Can Work For You (And Your Communities)

w/ Mallori DeSalle & Lodge McCammon



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### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

- 1) DECIDE ON AN ABSURD NAME THAT YOU WILL GO BY DURING THIS WORKSHOP  
ABSURD NAME OPTIONS...
  - TITLE + FAVORITE FOOD
  - PET'S NAME + PIECE OF CLOTHING + "BOTTOM"
  - MAKE UP YOUR OWN
- 2) CHANGE YOUR NAME IN ZOOM  
*(OR PUT A COMMENT IN THE CHAT WITH YOUR ABSURD NAME)*

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### LAUGH IT OFF! EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND

- Humor and laughter help maintain well-being by reframing stressful events (Perchtold et al., 2019).
- Humor can also change the regular patterns created by past discomforts, which can produce a shift in perspective and a desirable transformation. (Landoni, A. M., 2019).
- Comedy increases social engagement and improves retention of information (Coronel et al., 2021).
- Laughter can serve as a social reward that reinforces behavior and conveys affiliation and can communicate social norms (Wood & Niedenthal, 2018)

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### LAUGH IT OFF! EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND - 2

- Humor can function to reinforce the solidarity of groups. However, it can also segregate community or coalition members who were not part of the "in-crowd" (Taylor et al., 2021).
- Humor can create connections that help decrease loneliness (Curran et al., 2021).
- Humor is useful for building rapport with groups like coalitions and in relationships with key stakeholders, reducing concern (Hussong & Micucci, 2021).
- Humor can be used to help communicate difficult issues, and cope with challenges. Though prevention is focused on delaying challenges, it can be used in primary, secondary and tertiary aspects of our work (Dziegielewski et al., 2004).

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### LAUGH IT OFF! EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND - 3

- One study showed when a person laughed for 30 minutes, there were significant physical and mental benefits (Manninen et al., 2017).
- Using humor and laughter directly after experiencing a stressful situation produces a reduction in stress hormones and creates lasting, positive feelings. In fact, when practicing humor, muscles become more relaxed, breathing changes, and the brain releases endorphins, which are the body's natural painkillers (Whalen, 2010).
- Having a sense of humor and being quick to laugh can have both psychological and physiological benefits. Imagine how powerful it would be to include humor in your work with the youth, families and professionals you collaborate with in your community (Cousins, 1979).

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### BOUNDARIES

- Let's begin with a paradox, which is a situation that has contradictory features: Humor and laughter are desperately needed today. Humor and laughter are very risky today.
- Therapeutic humor isn't about us delivering jokes and telling you what is funny. If we do that, it will alienate a large percentage of any audience, especially these days. It's about us inviting you to find your own funny. Evoking humor can safely help everyone access more joy in life.

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### PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

- We have done our best to design an open and positive learning environment for you today. Our goal is to create a safe and supportive space where everyone can make jokes and be creative at their own pace. We will not be making jokes that "other" or "punch down." Instead, we will be exploring the warm, healing, and absurd side of humor.
- We believe that it is important to uphold a learning culture that embraces error and experimentation without fear of penalty and to establish psychological safety for all participants. Therapeutic humor can be a stepping stone towards creating psychological safety and we look forward to modeling that through collaboration and inclusion.

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### THE HUMOR GAMES: ROUND 1 (ABSURDITY)

THE FOLLOWING HUMOR EXERCISES HELP US PRACTICE GENERATING ABSURDITY IN ANY SITUATION. UNEXPECTED ABSURDITY CREATES A SURPRISE THAT CAN SPARK LAUGHTER IN OURSELVES AND OTHERS.

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THE HUMOR GAMES: ROUND 1

DON'T BE PART OF THE PROBLEM

BE absurd

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THE HUMOR GAMES: ROUND 1

THEM:  
WHERE DID YOU LEARN TO DANCE LIKE THAT?



ME: absurd

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THE HUMOR GAMES: ROUND 1

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU KNOW



IT'S absurd

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THE HUMOR GAMES: ROUND 1

THERE ARE THREE THINGS  
I PRIDE MYSELF ON

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1) expected  
2) expected  
AND 3) absurd

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THE HUMOR GAMES: ROUND 1

I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY  
(and how many)  
IT WILL TAKE TO BE HAPPY TODAY



BUT SO FAR  
IT'S MORE THAN (and how many)

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THE HUMOR GAMES: ROUND 2 (THERAPEUTIC)

THE FOLLOWING THERAPEUTIC HUMOR EXERCISES HELP US PRACTICE REFRAMING THE STRUGGLES IN OUR LIVES. IF WE'RE ABLE TO QUICKLY FIND THE FUNNY IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS, IT CAN HELP US COPE.

THESE EXERCISES ALLOW US TO TAKE SHORT VACATIONS INTO THE ABSURD, WHICH CAN HELP US ACCESS MORE LAUGHTER AND RELEASE THE TENSION OF CHALLENGING FEELINGS.

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THE HUMOR GAMES: ROUND 2

I AM NOW  
complaint about a physical or mental difficulty



YEARS OLD

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THE HUMOR GAMES: ROUND 2

FOR SALE:  
something bothersome



SERIOUS INQUIRIES ONLY

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THE HUMOR GAMES: ROUND 2

NOT TO BRAG  
OR ANYTHING



BUT I CAN  
something about that bothers me about me

BETTER THAN ANYONE  
YOU'VE EVER MET

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THE HUMOR GAMES: ROUND 2




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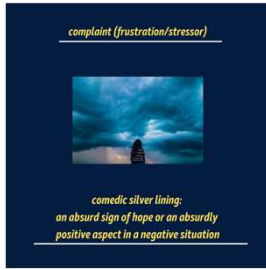
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THE HUMOR GAMES: ROUND 2




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THE HUMOR GAMES: SILVER LINING




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THE HUMOR GAMES: SILVER LINING

Tension (Set-Up) →



Release (Punchline) →

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THE HUMOR GAMES: SILVER LINING



Someone stole my bike

I was looking for a reason to stop exercising anyway

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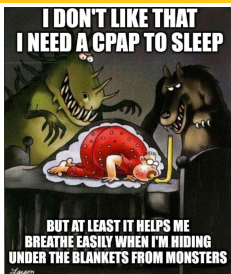
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THE HUMOR GAMES: SILVER LINING




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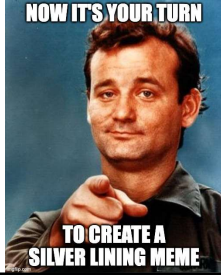
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THE HUMOR GAMES: SILVER LINING




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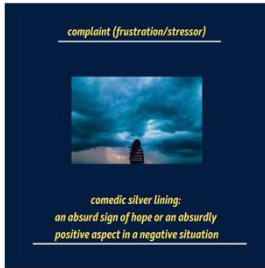
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THE HUMOR GAMES: ROUND 2




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TRANSFORMING COMPLAINTS INTO COMEDY

- MANY TIMES WHEN WE COMPLAIN, WE EXAGGERATE A FRUSTRATION AND RELIEVE IT OUT LOUD. COMPLAINING FLOODS THE BRAIN/BODY WITH CORTISOL, WHICH IS THE STRESS HORMONE.
- HOWEVER, IF WE WRAP OUR FRUSTRATIONS IN HUMOR, WE NO LONGER COMPLAIN, WE TELL JOKES. JOKES CAN SPARK LAUGHTER IN OURSELVES AND OTHERS, AND WHEN WE LAUGH, IT INSTANTLY REDUCES STRESS.

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THE HUMOR GAMES: SILVER LINING



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Client Warm-Up Exercise:

I came  
I saw  
I got booted off the internet



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