DA2

Incorporating Humor and Laughter into the Treatment Relationship

(Linda Thomson, MSN, APRN, ABMH, ABNH)
Bringing Humor and Laughter into the Therapeutic Relationship

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Disclosures

- I am the author of books and audio visual products, from which some of my teaching content is derived and for which I receive financial remuneration. These products will not be promoted or sold during this program.

Learning Objectives

- Describe three theories for the function of humor
- Name 4 positive effects of laughter
- Describe how to incorporate humor and laughter into clinical work

Gelotology: gelos (laughter)

- Study of laughter and its effects on the body from a psychological and physiological perspective
  - Hard wired
  - Therapeutic
Hliehhan

- Old English word for laughter
- Imitates the sounds of laughter
  - Ha Ha, Ho Ho, He He

The most wasted of all days is one without laughter.

ee cummings

Seven days without laughter makes one weak.

“I give them something to laugh at. Then while their mouths are open, I give them something to chew on.”

Billy Graham

Historical Perspective

- Aristotle – Laughter was good for the body, strengthens the lungs and enhances health of the whole organism
- 4th century - root of the word “Hele” meant health
- Henri de Mondeville – 13th century
  - Surgical recovery facilitated by laughter
  - Negative emotions interfered with healing
Historical Perspective

Middle Ages
- Laughter associated with unessential organ - the spleen
- Laughter like taking physical exercise
- Christianity – dim view of frivolity
  - Games, sports, comedies were immoral and illegal
- Pilgrims – laughter acceptable only if it was used to illustrate a moral lesson

Historical Perspective

1800s
- Herbert Spencer – Laughter serves as a restorative mechanism by releasing excess tension
- Laughter was felt to have great influence on keeping balance in physical health
  - Freud – saw positive and dark side to humor
    - Negative humor – may reflect bitterness, hostility and aggression
    - Positive humor – liberating, elevating and pleasurable

Historical Perspective

21st Century
- Human laughter is necessary for survival
- Infuses individual with a positive attitude necessary for meeting psychological, social and emotional needs and healing physical illness
- Allows momentary escapes from the rational world
- Helps ease tension and recover health

What makes people laugh

- Personality
- Culture
- Past experiences
- Many other factors

What makes you laugh?
When is funny not funny?

- When someone gets injured with a pratfall
- You have already heard the knock-knock joke
- When it is hurtful, mean-spirited or offensive
- Just doesn’t click with your sense of humor
- Social context

Studying humor is like dissecting a frog - you may know a lot but you end up with a dead frog

Mark Twain

Humor and Child Development

- 4 - 5 months - laughter without humor, delights in caregivers actions, reacting to rather than creating humor
- 6 - 12 months - laughing with others, mimicking adults
  - Peek-a-boo, This little piggy
- 12 - 15 months - transitioning from reacting to something funny to initiating it, likes incongruity
  - putting a diaper on his head, sunglasses on the dog's tail

Humor and Child Development

- 2 yrs - enjoys rhymes and nonsense words, intentionally making mistakes to show mastery
  - where's your nose, points to knees
- 3 yrs - slapstick and potty humor
  - physical humor - Ring-a -Round the Rosie, Can't catch me
- 4 - 5 yrs - form but no content, pre-riddle stage
  - meandering story for purpose of social interaction
### Humor and Child Development

- **6 - 7 years** - Riddles and Knock-knock jokes, helps establish and reinforce social bonds
- Jokes help children understand the subtleties of language

- **8 - 12 years** - Humor increases the social connectedness
  - “inside-joke”
  - Sense of humor is not inherited, it is nurtured
    - child’s sense of humor influenced more by father than mother

### Theories of Laughter

- Arousal Theory
- Discrepancy or Incongruity Theory
- Superiority Theory

### Arousal Theory

- Cognitive synergy / paradoxical
- Laughter reduces the negative emotional response (dark or black humor)
  - ex - mom with dementia
- Reduces sexual tension
Ambiguity or Discrepancy Theory

- something different from expectation
- Laughter happens at the moment discrepancy disappears and there is enlightenment
- punch line

Superiority or Relief Theory

- Laughter occurs when someone can look down on someone and feel superior or relieved that it is not happening to them
- ex - slapstick
- ex - blond jokes, ethnic humor

Universal characteristics of humor

- Incongruity
  - Oxymorons
    - jumbo shrimp, act naturally, working vacation, definite maybe, same difference, genuine imitation

Universal characteristics of humor

- An unexpected future
  - an expected event replaced by unexpected: punchlines, slapstick
Universal characteristics of humor

- Absurdity, ludicrousness, or ridiculousness
  - ridiculous or exaggerated perception

- A pleasant surprise
  - tricked into feeling delighted
    - ex. sign at the plumbers “a flush beats a full house”
    - ex. sign at the muffler shop “No appointment necessary. We will hear you coming.”

- Being startled
  - if stimulus is quickly perceived as being non-threatening
    - ex. Smile, you’re on candid camera

- “Getting it”
  - the joy of solving the twist of the situation
Universal characteristics of humor

- Emotional chaos remembered in tranquility
  - the chaos of the past is viewed at a peaceful moment in the future
  - lightens the load of coping with trauma, cancer, pain, etc

Categories of Laughter

- Spontaneous
- Simulated
- Stimulated
- Induced
- Pathological

Once stimulus is perceived as humorous, it triggers a reaction

- Physiological
  - laughter
- Cognitive
  - wit
- Emotional
  - mirth

WIT

- Changes negative thinking patterns
- Helps break up rigid ways of thinking associated with emotional distress
  - depression, anxiety, anger
- Helps us to see the world with perspective
  - reducing the impact of stressors around us
MIRTH

- Distressing emotions and mirth cannot occupy the same psychological space
- Mirth can be used to decrease another's anger, pain, distress

Mindful Mirth

- To create a mirthful state by maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our pleasant thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment without judgement

LAUGHTER

- Physiologic reaction to humor
  - increases certain antibodies
  - reduces specific stress hormones
  - increases pain tolerance

“If you lose the power to laugh, you lose the power to think.”

Clarence Darrow
Laughter is the Best Medicine

- Temporarily stimulates sympathetic nervous system
- Increasing catecholamines
- Releases endorphins
- Relaxation follows the temporary state of arousal stimulated by laughter
  - Calming of heart rate, respiration and muscle tension

The Effects of a Good Belly Laugh

- Moves the diaphragm massaging the internal organs
- Increases and deepens respiration
- Increases oxygenation
- Increases circulation
- Exercises muscles of face, chest and abdomen
- Facilitates digestion
  - Relaxing the system, altering gastric pH, reducing colonic spasms

Laughter enhances immune system

- Increases number of T-lymphocytes by activating natural killer cells
- Raises IgA, IgG and IgM

Laughter reduces the Stress Response

- Decreases cortisol
- Decreases epinephrine
- Decreases growth hormone
- Decreases 3,4 dihydrophenylacetic acid - major dopamine catabolite
- Increases endorphins
Mental effects of Laughter Therapy

- Reduces tension, anxiety, hatred, & anger
- Alleviates stress & depression
- Improves insomnia, memory failure & dementia


Psychological effects of laughter

- Elevates mood, self-esteem, hope, energy and vigor
- Enhances memory and creative thinking
- Improves interpersonal interaction
- Increases friendliness & helpfulness
- Improves quality of life
- Intensifies mirth & is contagious

Jong Eun Yim, 2018

Laughter is the Best Medicine

“Laughter is like a bulletproof vest”

- Norman Cousins “Anatomy of an Illness” 1979
- Marx Brothers and Candid Camera - 20 min gave Cousins 2 pain-free hours

Body & Mind can be healthy only when the psychological aspects of the brain are changed, beyond just physical treatment

American Association of Therapeutic Humor
Impact of laughter on air trapping in severe chronic obstructive lung disease

Clown performed a humor intervention triggering laughter
Decreased TLC by >10% in 22% of patients
Improved cheerfulness
Uncovered a useful smiling derived breathing technique

Cardiac Benefits of Laughter

• Dilates blood vessels
• Reduces cholesterol uptake
• Reduces blood platelets from clotting together
• Decreases inflammation
• Slows aging of blood vessels

Heal Your Heart:
The Positive Emotions Prescription to Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease

Dr. Michael Miller
Professor of Medicine
Cardiology
University of Maryland

Laughter Yoga
“It’s all about the breath”

• Developed in India in 1995
• Laughter Yoga, Adults Living With Parkinson’s Disease, and Caregivers
• Laughter yoga versus group exercise program in elderly depressed women
• The Impact of Laughter Yoga on the Stress of Cancer Patients before Chemotherapy.
• Laughter and humor therapy in dialysis
• Effects of Laughter Therapy on Immune Responses in Postpartum Women.
Summary aka Assignment

- Carry a prop
- Learn & share a joke
- email something funny
- Make fun of yourself
- Exaggerate a situation
- Read the funnies
- Keep a laughter library
- lol

Humor Exercises

- Smile for no apparent reason
- Bend down and stand up laughing
- Walk around as if you are smelling a bad fart
- Walk around as if hearing a funny joke on your cell phone
- Ho Ho Ha Ha Ha
- Ants in the pants
- Argue and Laugh at same time

References


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RESOURCES

- American Holistic Nurses Association
- American Nurses Association
- Appreciative Inquiry
- Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor
- Comedy Warriors
- Dream Doctors
- Humor Project
- iMindMap
- International Society for Humor Studies
- National Humor Month
- National Institute for Play
- World Laughter Tour, Inc.