

ADVICE HEALTH SCIENCE & WELLNESS

Unleash the Hidden Power of Laughing With Your Kids

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Sometimes life can be tough. Whether we are feeling anxious about current affairs or dealing with a health issue, something as simple as laughter, believe it or not, can help us persevere.

As adults, we can get bogged down with our to-do lists and stresses of daily life, and forget how beautiful it is to let loose and have a good laugh. Unfortunately, most adults do not laugh enough. In fact, one study found that healthy children may laugh as much as 400 times per day, but adults only laugh 15 times per day.

We can learn so much from our children when it comes to being lighthearted. It is important to raise them in such a way that they will continue to experience fun and laughter throughout their lives. We can create a positive environment for them to grow up in by stopping once in a while to have a laughing fit together.

Laughter really is like medicine. According to the Mayo Clinic, laughing is one of the easiest ways for us to reduce stress and anxiety in our lives. Laughing transforms our body and mind in many amazing ways, boosting positive emotions.

When we laugh, the ventromedial prefrontal cortex of our brain is activated. This releases feel-good hormones called endorphins that allow us to experience pleasure and satisfaction. Laughing also reduced our stress response because the level of stress hormones like cortisol, epinephrine (adrenaline), and dopamine are lowered.

We feel energized since we take in more oxygen-rich air when we laugh. Finally, laughing relaxes our muscles, which soothes tension from stress. In fact, a good laugh can leave your muscles relaxed for up to 45 minutes.

The muscles that help us smile also affect how we feel. When we use these muscles, we trigger a part of our brain that improves our mood. One particular research study involved having participants hold a pencil in one of three ways in order to get them to make certain facial expressions without telling them exactly what they were doing.

The first group held the pencil sideways in their mouths to force a smile. The second group stuck the pencil in lengthwise to force a frown. The last group, serving as the control group, held the pencil in their hands. Participants were then asked to watch cartoons and rate how funny there were to them.

The group with the sideways pencils (the “smiling” group) had higher funny ratings than the lengthwise group (the “frowning” group). The control group scored between the other two groups, demonstrating how smiling and laughing can really make a difference in how we perceive the world around us.

Researchers also found that facial expressions can reduce negative feelings like pain and sadness. In one study, researchers applied an uncomfortable heat to subjects’ arms and then instructed them to make either a relaxed face, an uncomfortable face, or a neutral face.

The results showed that the people who made a relaxed face experienced less pain than those who made an uncomfortable or neutral face. Smiling releases endorphins and serotonin, which are thought to reduce any pain we feel.

Laughter can also change how we look at a situation. A silly moment can offer a healthy distraction from negative emotions like anger, guilt, and stress. It’s hard to feel bad when you’re cracking up! When faced with challenges, a lighthearted perspective helps us view such events as positive opportunities as opposed to threats.

Laughter builds resilience and the ability to adapt to adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or stress. When children are resilient, they are braver, more curious, more adaptable, and more able to obtain happiness and success.

Resilience cushions us from mental health conditions like anxiety and depression. (Mayo Clinic 2015) Laughter plays a huge role in how we handle adversity by allowing us to escape from our problems for a little while. By teaching our kids to laugh even in times of pain, we are giving them a key tool that will help them be more resilient as they grow older.

Laughing with our kids is so special because it builds a bond with them. These joyous moments create a more uplifting environment at home. What’s really fun is that laughter tends to be contagious, so before you know it your whole house could be giggling up a storm.

So, how can we laugh more with our kids? Here are 10 ideas to get you rolling:

- Start a laughing contest to see who can make the other person laugh first.
- Play fun games like charades, Twister, Pictionary, and Headbanz.
- Read joke books and websites, and then share your favorites with each other.
- Create funny stories using Mad Libs or whisper down the lane.
- Have a family talent show and see who comes up with the funniest routine.
- Dress up in silly costumes.
- Watch a comedy television show or movie together as a family.
- Talk in a silly language like Pig Latin.
- Keep a collection of funny quotes and pictures that you can bring out at any time to get everyone laughing.
- Try laughter yoga with your kids. Created by Dr. Madan Katari in 1995 in Bombay, India, this yoga practice combines breathing exercises, yoga, stretching, and laughing. Look for resources like Laughter Friends and LiveStrong.com’s guide to teaching laughter yoga to children.

For more intriguing facts about laughter, check out this infographic by Happify.



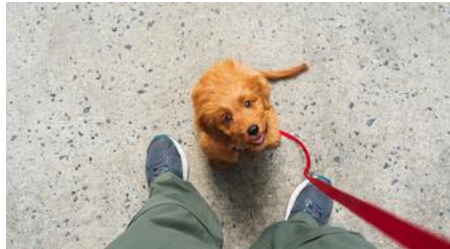
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


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