

House Filled With Laughter Keeps Families Healthy

by Jim Slempp

At a recent parent meeting, we talked some about humor and family life. I believe few attributes are more valuable in promoting good health than a sense of humor. Laughter stimulates circulation, stabilizes blood pressure, oxygenates the blood and massages vital organs. It promotes a love of life, reduces stress and smoothes interpersonal relationships.

What about your house? Is a good sense of humor and love of laughter one of the essential skills and attitudes your children will learn from you? Whether or not you consider yourself a comedian, you can employ a ready smile and a sense of wit to great advantage.

Take discipline, for example. A sense of humor helps conscientious parents “allow kids to be kids.” Laughter can also be cleansing to the human spirit, especially in moments of crisis and emotion. Even in the midst of grief or anxiety, a humorous remark or witty observation can help us forget our sorrow and enjoy a moment of relief. In addition, nothing dispels tension and brings a sense of balance in the midst of conflict like a round of laughter. A bit of wit diffuses confrontations and soothes tempers.

Here are some ways to promote laughter and a good sense of humor in your home:

- Begin by learning to laugh at yourself and your own mistakes. Don't take yourself too seriously.
- In those dull moments when everyone is tired or the weather is lousy, laugh about it. Read some funny stories aloud or go through the “Guinness Book of World Records” for such chucklers as the world's longest fingernails (usually there's a picture of the winner).
- Lighten up tedious or dull family chores with some good jokes or riddles.
- Keep a young spirit through healthy practical joking. Be careful to distinguish between healthy laughter and ridicule, sarcasm or excessive teasing. Laughter heals; the others can wound.
- Keep an eye out for spontaneous funny family moments that can be recorded and cherished in years to come.
- Clip cartoons to share with other family members or tape to the refrigerator. Collect funny stories or incidents throughout the day and make a habit to tell them at dinnertime along with jokes and riddles. Laughter aids in digestion.

A childhood without laughter would be a dismal story indeed. Laughter is good medicine and you can be the family doctor.

SPEND QUALITY TIME TOGETHER

Busy parents, especially those who are working, or single working parents, have limited time to spend with their children. Spending time with your child, no matter what the age, is extremely important, but research suggests it is the quality of time spent, not the quantity, that is important.

The quality of time that you spend together can be enhanced by talking and listening to your child.

Communicating with your child encourages her to express ideas, improve vocabulary and develop thinking skills, all of which are important for success in school. Quality time can occur at any time or any place: driving in the car, riding in the bus, taking a walk in the park, or a stroll through the neighborhood, or going for ice cream after dinner are all good opportunities for talking together. Cleaning the kitchen, doing laundry or washing dishes together provides time to communicate with each other and keep in touch with each other's activities. Children of all ages especially enjoy having your full attention at bedtime, when you can read or talk together.

You can use the following ideas to get started and make the time spent with your children count:

Ten-minute chats - Ten minute chats are a fun bedtime habit. Create a list of interesting topics you and your child can share. For starters, try these: the funniest person I ever met, the most important part of my body, a faraway place I'd like to wake up in, what I'll be like when I get old, a family relative I'd like to visit, the task I'm bad at, the tasks I'm best at, odd places I've fallen asleep, good qualities of our family.

How well do you know your child? - Write down your answers to these questions without discussing them with your child. Then ask your child for the correct answers. Be ready for some surprises.

- Name your child's best friend.
- Within three pounds, how much does your child weigh?
- What is your child's greatest disappointment?
- If your child could change one personal physical characteristic, what would it be?
- Which chore does your child hate the most?
- What is your child's favorite song?
- If your child could visit anywhere in the world, where would it be?
- What would your child say is his best quality?
- Which are your child's favorite and worst subjects in school?
- If your child could set bedtime and curfews, what would they be?

A challenge - Challenge your children over dinner to list 20 things that were not invented when you were their age. (Waterbeds, hair crimpers, trash compactors, skateboards, polyester fabrics, etc.) Ask which we would be better off without and cap the conversation with some thoughts about the conveniences and good things you enjoy as a family.

Rut-buster questions - Mealtime and drivetime conversations can be among the most rewarding when there are some thought-revealing questions to start things off. Keep the magic growing with well-phrased questions of your own, those which deal with the issues we face most every day. Here are a few to try:

- What's the scariest thing you've ever done on a dare?

- When is it OK to borrow something without permission and when is it not?
- When did you stand up for something you thought was right even though a lot of people got mad at you? Would you do it again?
- What tricks do your friends use to get you to do things they know you really don't want to do?
- If you knew by practicing hard, you would become the best at your school at something, what would you work on?
- Do you try to act like your friends more than they try to act like you? Explain.

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