

FIND YOUR PEACE



Your guide to creating a life of
mindfulness and stress resilience



Week 6: Laughter

What makes laughter so good for you? Is it the act of laughing, the feeling of mirth, or just an overall lightness of spirit?

If you're a super Type-A person whose mind works in spreadsheets, organized to the nth degree, parsing conversations to make sure the right words are used at the right time for the right things, you may challenge this chapter because we do not separate out these variables: humor (a sense of funniness), laughter (the physical motor action of laughing), or a lightness of spirit (a general attitude).

From the standpoint of your mind, the distinction between these three doesn't seem to matter much. If you have a lightness of spirit without laughter, you still get the positive benefits.

If you just laugh out loud on purpose, it triggers reactions in your body that lead to positive outcomes for your mental state. Somehow your body equates these as the same.

It may seem weird and stressful, but the technical differences that exist between humor, mirth, and laughter itself are irrelevant. They all produce the same positive effect for you.

So don't sweat it! Laugh, play, have fun, be positive, and let your body reap the rewards.

ASSESS YOURSELF

How big is your funny bone?

Some people laugh out loud. Others hold that impulse inside. Some people are naturally silly and funny things occur to them all the time. Others are more naturally serious. In other words, the sense of humor varies wildly from one person to the next.

So how about you? How big is your funny bone? To understand this, think about how often you laugh in a room full of others. When you're in a movie theater watching a funny movie, actively look around and notice when you laugh compared the others around you. When you are with a group of people and

something funny is done/said, actively notice how much you laugh compared to others.

Keep in mind that there is no wrong answer and it doesn't matter if your funny bone is big or small. However, it is good to understand that about yourself.

Once you know, you can decide if this is something you want to change. If you feel like you could add more levity to your life and have a lighter spirit, you can make the changes to make that happen. First, you have to know how big your funny bone is.



MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

Two ways to practice “de-centering”

Laughter and humor have their limitations with plenty of nuance to their use. If there has been loss or pain, laughter can be taken as insensitive. If there has been a relationship upset, laughter can be taken as disregard. Sarcasm can be a brilliant use of humor in some cases, but in others can be taken as a spiteful comment. Knowing the difference between one and the other is absolutely key.

To do this, be aware of your surroundings. Be aware of the context of your comments and who hears them. It's great to express yourself and have fun

doing it. However, if you're the only one laughing, you can bet that you crossed a line somewhere.

Not everyone has the same sense of humor. There will always be some that click with your humor and some who don't. Be aware of your audience when speaking. This also means that you can select the friends who laugh at the same sense of funny that you have. At that point, your sense of humor will be working for you.



Funny makes no sense. But, let's go with it anyway!

Why on earth would your body care about laughter? It's very clear that humor and a lightness of spirit is hugely beneficial to your overall well-being, but why would that be?

I understand the principles of natural selection and reasons some traits get selected over others. For example ...

- If you are a better hunter, you are more likely to survive and pass on your genes.
- If you are better at raising children, you are more likely to survive and pass on your genes.
- If you are better at fostering the good of the group, the group is more likely to survive and pass on their genes.

But what role does humor play in any of that? How does a sense of fun contribute to survival? Maybe it's because laughter can indicate who is in your group and who is not? Maybe it's because it helps sustain and maintain relationships within that group?

So far as the research is concerned, the reason WHY laughter and a positive attitude creates such health benefits -- and where it fits into our development as a species -- is 100% conjecture. However, the reason WHY is less important to me and you than the fact that this effect is real.

Having a positive attitude, finding the good, the humorous, and the positive aspects of your circumstances boosts your immune system, increases energy levels, as well as the health of your cardiovascular system. So while we're waiting on scientists to figure out the whys and wherefores, we should take a step back and get the benefits anyway.

Find the funny.

Relax and play.

Have a lightness of spirit.

What's truly funny is that you and I can get the wonderful health outcomes whether science figures out why it happens or not!