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THE LEARNING BRAIN

Each week in BCPVPA eNews, we share tips, links and self-assessment tools that will help our members to better understand the mental health continuum, and to use the resources that are available.

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PLAY AND LAUGHTER

By Rochelle Morandini

We thought we would lighten up this week's issue of *The Learning Brain* and bring in some mood enhancers! No, not the kind of self-soothing compounds you buy online or in a store, but ones that are already within you—laughter and the ability to play! LOL - Let's start with laughter.

LAUGHTER

Definition: Laughter is an expression or appearance of merriment or amusement.

It's true—laughter is strong medicine. It draws people together in ways that trigger healthy physical and emotional changes in the body. To bring your mind and body back into balance, nothing works faster or is more reliable than a good laugh.

Humour lightens your burdens, inspires hope, connects you to others, and keeps you grounded, focused, and alert. It also helps you release anger and forgive sooner. With so much power to heal and renew, the ability to laugh easily and frequently is a tremendous resource for surmounting problems, enhancing your relationships, and supporting both physical and emotional health. Best of all, this priceless medicine is fun, free, and easy to use.¹



[Watch this 2 minute video](#) from the Mayo Clinic on the Surprising Health Benefits of Laughter.

¹ helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/laughter-is-the-best-medicine.htm

What does the research say?

There are many studies indicating that those with a good sense of humour tend to be more resilient.

“Humour brings together the whole brain. Several research studies have shown that after perceiving something funny, we become more creative at problem solving. Laughter increases creativity and flexibility in thought. In summary, we need to find something that will stimulate our physical body, mental state and spiritual awareness to develop a mind-body connection or acquire whole-health.”¹

A good sense of humour could—it seems—allow individuals to find humour and a cause for laughter, rather than feel threatened when faced with a potential stressor. In addition to facilitating more positive appraisals of potential threats, a good sense of humour also could have a more global effect by allowing for a generally more positive perspective about oneself and the world.²

¹ https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/laughter_can_benefit_your_physical_and_mental_health

² [Kuiper & Martin, 1993; Lefcourt & Martin, 1986; Martin et al., 2003](#)

A GOOD SENSE OF HUMOUR MAY BE LIKE A LENS THROUGH WHICH THE WORLD IS VIEWED.

According to an article on the website Emotionally Resilient Living, humour and the ability to get out of your own way can help us avoid becoming mired in feelings of negativity and helplessness so that we are better able to see what needs to be done to move forward.

The article offers examples of how those who have survived the most unimaginable circumstances relied on their sense of humour as a powerful survival tool.

“Laughter sets the spirit free to move through even the most tragic circumstances. It helps us shake our heads clear, get our feet back under us and restore our sense of balance and purpose. Humour is integral to our peace of mind and ability to go beyond survival.”

Captain Gerald Coffee, POW in Vietnam

The article goes on to describe how we can enhance our sense of humour by surrounding ourselves with reminders to keep events and circumstances in perspective, and to look for the humour even in the most outrageous situations.

So, how can we incorporate more laughter in our lives? Here are some ways to help us laugh more...

- Watch funny movies or TV shows.
- Learn to laugh at yourself.
- Share funny moments (even if they are embarrassing) with friends.
- Check out your bookstore's humour section.
- Seek out playful people who laugh easily.
- Begin today to remove toxic people from your life!¹



Even just smiling has been shown to have positive benefits. In case you need an excuse, here are **10 reasons to smile everyday!**²

- Smiling makes us attractive
- Smiling relieves stress
- Smiling elevates our mood
- Smiling is contagious
- Smiling boosts your immune system
- Smiling lowers your blood pressure
- Smiling makes us feel good
- Smiling makes you look younger
- Smiling makes you appear more confident and successful
- Smiling helps you stay positive

[Check out this article: Maintaining a sense of humour to cope.](#)

¹ <https://www.emotionallyresilientliving.com/how-can-we-quickly-find-humour-in-this>

² <https://www.verywellmind.com/top-reasons-to-smile-every-day-2223755>



“We don’t stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing.”

- George Bernard Shaw

PLAY

Definition: A state of engagement or participation in an activity for pleasure or recreation.

Play connects our imagination with experience and stimulates brain development, creativity, relationship building, trust and emotional regulation. Play is also one of the most effective tools for keeping relationships fresh and exciting. ¹

[Check out this article](#) on the importance of play for adults. [This CNN article has a quick video](#) on why play is important for adults!

Why does our focus on play diminish as we grow older?

Our society tends to dismiss play for adults. Play is perceived as unproductive, petty or even a guilty pleasure. The notion is that once we reach adulthood, it’s time to get serious. And between personal and professional responsibilities, there’s no time to play.²

Possible factors blocking adults from play:

- Lack of appreciation or permission for play and laughter from family or origin (we are shamed or punished)
- Lack of appreciation or permission for play and laughter at workplace or in social circles (see as unproductive or unfocused)
- Lack of priority on play and laughter due to time constraints, social pressures, cultural expectations (serious tasks of survival or material pursuits and responsibilities take over)
- Lack of emotional or mental resiliency or inability to be vulnerable (we are in chronic state of overwhelm, whereas play and laughter come more spontaneously and easily from a relaxed, regulated state)³

¹ [The Resilient Mind, Laughter and Play](#)

² <https://psychcentral.com/blog/the-importance-of-play-for-adults/>

³ [The Resilient Mind, Laughter and Play](#)

So how can we incorporate more play into our lives?

Here are the top 5 ways I personally incorporate play into my life:



1. Search YouTube for funny videos (my family has our favourites)
2. Play with my children: play follow the leader on our bikes, play board games, dance in the living room, or, I will admit, I love to challenge them in *Mariokart 8!*
3. Watch animals play and/or play with them (with 4 cats and one dog – this one is easy for me!)
4. Seek out people, environments or stimuli that makes you laugh out loud every day (this is why I watch *Jimmy Kimmel Live*— from his house —every evening!)
5. We do a lot of crafts, especially during this quarantine. Neither my two boys nor I are particularly crafty, but we have been doing some easy and fun crafts: painting rocks, making sun catchers and practicing 'learn to draw' tutorials online (my sons like to draw Disney characters)

Check out these videos: Calming Crafts: [Things to Help you Relax and De-Stress](#) and [Fun DIY Projects Guaranteed to Relieve Stress](#) (I think I may try some of these next!)



Other ways to encourage more play in your life:

- Invite friends to join you in watching a funny movie (even if this is over Zoom!)
- Use unscheduled time to be creative, daydream, reflect and decompress—imagine places you want to see, activities you want to try, and even people you may want to meet
- Hang out with playful people (within physical distancing guidelines!)
- Try colouring or dot-to-dot books
- Try puzzle books (such as crosswords, Suduko, wordfinds)
- Write poetry or short stories
- Try new things and experience the unexpected
- Participate in a variety of arts/sports/activities whenever you can to expand your horizons
- Try karaoke (you didn't think I would leave this off the list!)

If you feel blocked in your ability to engage in play and laughter, it may be a good idea to talk to a professional. They may be able to help you understand why this block exists for you and how you can work towards a life with more enjoyment through laughter and play.



WHAT OTHER HEALTH TOPICS DO YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT?



Let us know on our Twitter and Instagram this week!
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Next week

Investing in Relationships While Social Distancing



Anna Kolosyuk - unsplash.com

Get in touch! If you have any questions about The Learning Brain series, contact

Rochelle Morandini rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca 604-689-3399