6 ways Laughter can improve children's well being

The Importance of Laughter for Child Development

Laughter ... it is an almost vital element in the lives of most people; and if it isn't, they're probably not enjoying life very much. Laughter is among the best things about living. It helps people of all ages cope with their experiences, which is why it has long been called the "best medicine", and it communicates much about individual personalities and mental processes.

We need laughter in our lives more than ever at the moment. Many of us are learning to live without the close contact of family members and close friends. Adults, who have learned techniques to deal with this absence, are usually resilient, and are aware that this is a blip in our history and that soon we will be able to spend time with loved ones. Children, especially those in Early Years Education, have yet to build up this resilience and are unable to see an end to this situation. At a time when they should be building the social skills that will carry them through life, they are learning to live without their peers and the shared experiences that are so important to healthy childhood development.

Laughter comes easily to children but this laughter usually comes from an external source; a classmate making a funny face or a strange noise can set a child into fits of laughter that is seemingly endless. Adults are quick to become annoyed at this laughter as we believe it to be without merit; the immaturity of children so evidently displayed. But this attitude fails to recognise the importance of laughter in a child's development. As adults we (usually) spurn this childish humour because we have developed our own humour to be more 'sophisticated'. But without this foundation of humour and laughter, how will children develop into adults? Could they be doomed to become the generation that still guffaws at the most basic of humour; that holds up fart jokes as the pinnacle of comedy!?

Laughter has so many positive benefits, both physical and mental, in the development of a child.

Below are six exercises you can try for yourself or with your class laughing along with you.

Book a discovery 15 minutes Call Today

https://calendly.com/cannedlaughter/laughter-discovery-call

1 Laughter encourages social interaction.

The ability to share a laugh connects people at a deeper level. We are all drawn to laughter, regardless of our age.

Consider a child who is left out of a group who are having fun. The lone child will stare enviously at the group, wishing they could be part of the activity that is causing so much fun. The child will skirt the group, their anxiety growing as they long to be accepted and to share the laughter. The child will experience a sense of loss; of not being able to share in the fun and laughter; of not being a part of something bigger than themselves. The laughter this group shares suggests shared values and experiences, a sense of togetherness. And the child wants to be part of that group so they can rid themselves of their anxiety and feel part of something bigger.

Laughter is a great ice breaker and a great equaliser that can cut through many social, cultural, religious and economic barriers. Sharing a laugh shows that we are all human beings who can respond to the same stimulus as everyone else. Wouldn't it be great to teach children this idea so they no longer have to feel anxious around groups?

Task!

Take your hand as if it was a phone and pretend it's the funniest thing you have heard all day. Then pass the phone to the next person in the group and get them to do the same.

Keep going until everyone has had a go and had a good laugh.

Try and laugh for at least one minute! It's not easy, but you will feel the benefits.

Watch the video!

https://youtu.be/ChEZO4BJ6_U

2 Laughter reduces stress and anxiety

It's a cliché that 'laughter is the best medicine' but, like most words of wisdom that are in common use, they're a cliché for a reason; because they're true!

It's a cliché that 'laughter is the best medicine' but, like most words of wisdom that become true, they're a cliché for a reason, because it's true!

Children experience stress and anxiety in the same way as adults but rarely have the experience to understand these strange sensations that they are feeling.

Laughter can act as a strong medicine that triggers healthy physical and emotional changes to the body. When someone laughs their blood pressure is lowered and at the same time the level of cortisol, a hormone the body produces at stressful times, is reduced, helping to relax the body.

A good, hearty laugh relieves physical tension and stress and leaves your muscles relaxed for up to 45 minutes.

When we laugh we automatically trigger the release of endorphins, the natural chemical that makes us feel good, into our bloodstream. This is the same thing that happens when you exercise for a significant period. And we all know how good exercise is for us.

Anger, and the associated heightened levels of stress and anxiety, are also reduced by laughter. It is physically impossible to laugh and be angry at the same time. Laughter overcomes the negative emotional cost that anger brings to our bodies and makes us feel calmer and more rational about the original problem.

Task!

Arms Stretched exercise.

Reach your arms out in front of you, hands facing upwards.

Take a deep breath in, as you bend your arms up towards your face. Hold your breath for a couple of seconds, and then breathe out.

Repeat this process, breathe in, Hold, Hold, Hold – Now breathe out a long ha ha ha ha ha, until you have no laughter left.

Breathe in, hold, hold, hold, and breathe out.

Watch the video!

https://youtu.be/-eLfozTLEz4

3 Laughter opens the creative side of your mind

Laughter can help us solve problems that require creative solutions by making it easier to think more freely and associate ideas more broadly. Research has shown that people in a light mood experience more eureka! moments and greater inspiration.

Consider groups of children working together to solve a problem. Often the more confident child in the group will take control and others will simply follow their lead or even worse, sit there and not contribute at all. The dynamic of the group needs to change so that all members take an active part. Laughter can help achieve this. Laughter can help individuals feel more relaxed and comfortable in each other's company and ready to work together as a team.

Research has shown that when we listen to a joke or any kind of humour, we use every part of our brain to help us understand what is being said.

First the left hemisphere starts to process what is being said, then the frontal lobe, the centre of our emotional response, kicks in and then right after this the right hemisphere begins to process the data it is receiving. As your brain 'gets' the joke the centre of our brain begins to elicit the feeling of happiness as a reward, and finally laughter erupts. And all this can take place in a matter of milliseconds!

This is not what happens when the brain experiences other emotions. Instead of using the whole brain, typical emotions are confined to specific areas of the brain. Laughter literally gets your whole brain fizzing and working together. When both sides of your brain are stimulated, learning is enhanced.

So the next time you set a problem to solve, create a humorous environment and watch the ideas flood in!

Mental Floss

Mental floss take an imaginary piece of floss, similar to that you would clean your teeth with, thread the floss through your ears, grabbing each side of the floss (either side of your ears, then make a flossing motion with your arms, whilst laughing.

Try this for one minute, to really open your creative brain.

Watch the video!
https://youtu.be/O7iVnVdETYg

4 Laughter boosts the immune system

We've already looked at how laughter can reduce stress and anxiety which in turn leads to better health, but research has also shown that laughter can help boost the immune system and keep the body more healthy and less prone to catching common ailments that are always prevalent in schools such as cold and flu. A class of healthy students usually means a healthy teacher, to!

Negative thoughts manifest themselves as chemical reactions in the body which increases stress in the system and decreases individual immunity.

Whereas positive thoughts help release chemicals that can fight stress and potentially more serious illnesses.

As well as making us feel great, the endorphins the body releases when we laugh can act as pain killers. It's no coincidence that nitrous oxide, often given to pregnant women to relieve pain, is nick-named 'laughing gas'.

When we laugh we actually change physiologically. We stretch muscles throughout our face and body, our pulse and blood pressure rise, and we breathe faster, sending more oxygen to our tissues. In fact, a good laughter session can act as a physical workout similar to a session in the gym. Just as with a usual workout, your body can be left aching after you've spent time laughing. But boy, is that a good ache!

When we laugh we actually change physiologically. We stretch muscles throughout our face and body, our pulse and blood pressure rise, and we breathe faster, sending more oxygen to our tissues. In fact, a good laughter session can act as a physical workout similar to a session in the gym. A bonus to this is that a laughter session fools your body into believing you're doing a workout so you get rewarded with a relaxing flow of endorphins. Just as with a usual workout, your body can be left aching after you've spent time laughing. But boy, is that a good ache!

Task!

Breathing and Laughter Technique – Open Heart Laughter

Exercise Breathing and Laughter technique, open heart laughter, be aware of your Endorphins.

Hold your hands in a prayer pose, to your heart. Push your hands forward, and breathe in, then open your arms fully to your side, whilst laughing out.

Repeat this process twice more.

How do you feel?

Watch the video! https://youtu.be/-Ywh8H4a8ks

5 Laughter lightens the mood

Laughter, a sense of humour and the ability to see the lighter side of situations are important free and easy to use tools that maintain and improve personal and group wellness. Laughter seems to be able to overcome the darkest of moods. As humans we are genetically inclined to laugh at situations that are often no laughing matter.

This ability to find happiness and joy at the darkest moments may come from early man and the constant threat that our ancestors came under from the many predators that surrounded them. After another restless night fighting off attacks, our ancestors realised the power of laughter and humour to make light of previous experiences. Laughter helps release tension and gives us a moment of peace, even if danger may never be far away.

Film makers and writers are aware of this and this is why that after an agonisingly tense scene, we're often given a humorous scene to help reduce the tension and prepare us for what might be coming next.

When we see someone laugh we are drawn to them, especially if we recognise that laughter might be missing from our lives, for whatever reason. We all feel down from time to time but seeing someone laugh can have a really beneficial reaction in our own bodies.

Happy people attract other happy people, so the happier you are, the more surrounded by friends and loved ones you'll be. When you're surrounded by happiness the mood is always going to be great. Just 10 to 15 minutes of laughter a day can significantly boost your mood, health and wellness and when you're happier, you're more likely to make healthy choices when it comes to your diet and lifestyle.

Task!

Meditation Breathing - Think of a balloon

Sit quietly, and close your eyes, breathe in deeply, thinking of your lungs being a balloon, expanding whilst you breathe in.

As you exhale, think of the balloon being let down.

Breathe in – Deeply, completely filling your balloon with your breath.

Exhale.

Repeat for 5 breaths.

What colour was your balloon?

Watch the video! https://youtu.be/ByAW-6T6FtE

6 Laughter is infectious

Some theorists suggest that laughter predates language; our ancestors used the positivity of laughter to express friendliness and human warmth. Laughter was a way to communicate that you meant another group no harm and that you wanted to belong. So even before we had language, laughter was being used to join groups together and to unite mankind. Even now, laughing is an important social tool that can build bonds between people. A laugh is a way to express and share common experiences.

'Laugh, and the whole world laughs with you', is an expression that shows us how infectious laughter can be.

Take a trip to the cinema (remember that!). If you're like me you'll find it nigh on impossible not to laugh if the rest of the audience finds something funny. If I was to watch the same thing at home, and not in a group, chances are I might raise a smile. Research has shown that laughter is 30 times more frequent in groups compared to private settings. That's not to say we don't find things funny when we're by ourselves, but we're more likely to smile or talk to ourselves than to roll on the floor laughing.

TV comedies (usually very unfunny ones) know this and is why they use a laughter track to 'help' us find something funny.

Laughter expresses our shared experiences of life and shows us, that despite our differences, we are all very similar animals.

Further research shows that when we hear sounds a part of our brain readies itself to react to that sound. When subjects were played laughter their facial muscles reacted and they began to smile.

When you are surrounded by the positive sound of laughter it is very difficult not to react in a positive way. Laughter expresses our shared experiences of life and shows us, that despite our many differences, we are all very similar animals.

Task!

Canned Laughter

Exercise: Listen to this audio track and laugh along for no reason, apart from laughters sake.

Book a discovery 15 minutes Call Today

https://calendly.com/cannedlaughter/laughter-discovery-call

So what next?

Laughter has so many positive and proven benefits that can support children, families, and your own wellbeing. Study after study show how laughter can connect you at a much deeper level.

Laughter has the ability to reduce levels of stress and anxiety, which many children can feel and which can lead to absence and a lack of motivation, as well as boosting the immune system to ward off those bugs that always seem to lurk in schools. A regular dose of laughter also stimulates the creative side of your brain, helping you and your class with problem solving activities.

These are of course all positive traits that everyone would want to use in their learning environment.

In the business world many companies have taken that first step to embrace laughter and benefit from the positivity that laughter can engender in groups. Schools and educational environments could also really benefit from the power of laughter. However, I do understand that you may still be a little apprehensive about whether or not laughter might work in your setting.

That is the reason why I am offering you a totally complimentary fifteen minute discovery phone call where you will have the opportunity to ask me any questions or raise any concerns you have about laughter working for your own and your class wellbeing.

I appreciate that laughter might not be for everyone: I really do get that. But with mental health issues affecting so many of our young people, can you really afford not to take a closer look?

The world is going through a really difficult time at the moment and no one really knows what 'normal' will look like in the coming weeks and months. Everyone is feeling anxious about the future, especially young people who may be feeling unconnected from their normal routines.

You have the chance to make a difference to your school or class, an opportunity to being something fresh and creative into your educational environment.

If you have noticed any of the negative feelings and emotions, below, from your students, then it is certainly worth a fifteen minute call to see if laughter could help you.

- **Anxiety about the future (when will things be normal again)**
- **Lack of enthusiasm**
- **Unmotivated**
- **Rising stress levels due to new ways of learning**
- **Missing the school environment and their friends**

In the **fifteen minute completely complimentary call,** you can ask me anything about how laughter might be able to help with these negative feelings.

To book a complimentary discovery call today, just click this link:

https://calendly.com/cannedlaughter/laughter-discovery-call

Questions I have received in the past include;

How long is a session?

How long does it work?

Why should I try laughter?

Who is it suitable for?

When is the best time to have a laughter session?

What do we need to wear?

What if my team are reluctant to try laughter?

How much is a laughter session?

Where is the best place to hold a session?

Should I stand or sit during the session?

I am here to answer these, and any other questions you may have.