Hospice and Palliative Care Conference 2015

Workshop Title:
Keeping a Light Heart: “Laughter is the Best Medicine”

Presented by: Meg Maly, MSW, LSW

Program Description:
Laugh as you lean to use humor as a stress reducer, to be healthier and happier in your life. Practical techniques for the reduction of fatigue and stress, will be demonstrated and practiced. Find out why laughter is the best medicine. Take home plenty of fun and useful ideas that can be used immediately to raise moral, lower stress, and delight your family, friends, and coworkers. Learn some fun humor exercises to brighten any day.

Format:
This interactive program consists of lecture, demonstration, discussion, small group exercises, handouts

Learning Objectives:
This workshop is designed to help participants to:
1. Understand the mental, emotional, physiological, and spiritual benefits of humor, positive thinking, and laughter
2. Acquire the practical skills ways to reduce stress and improve relaxation.
3. Demonstrate at least 3 “humor exercises” that reduce the stress response and stimulate the humor response for better health.
4. Learn how to change your attitude from negative to positive

Your Presenter Meg Maly, MSW, LSW

Meg Maly, MSW, LSW, is a Licensed Medical Social Worker, an Educational Specialist, a Motivational Speaker, and Stand Up Comic, with over 30 years experience presenting upbeat educational programs on Management Training, Communication, Stress Management, Therapeutic Humor, Health and Wellness, and other self help topics. Meg has a Bachelor of Science degree in Social Work from Edinboro University of PA and a Master’s Degree in Social Work from Case Western Reserve University.

She currently works as a Hospice Social Worker and Volunteer Program Director, for AseraCare Hospice, as well as a motivational speaker and stand up comic. Meg previously worked as the Wellness Program Coordinator for New Alliance Health Plan, an Educational Specialist for Saint Vincent Health Center, Family Education Coordinator for Family Services, and Director of the NW PA Alzheimer’s Association. She also served as adjunct faculty for Penn State University and Gannon University.

As a humorist she wrote a humor column for the Erie Times News. She has performed stand up comedy for over 20 years and has been a contributing writer for 3 joke books

The Presenter’s Email margaret.maly@aseracare.com

Printed Handout Packet
“Keeping a Light Heart”
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The Therapeutic Value of Humor

Humor laughter joy and fun are necessary to maintain health and wellness. The benefits are many:

PHYSICAL BENEFITS OF HUMOR AND LAUGHTER

“Laughter is like internal jogging”- Norman Cousins

1. Humor is the opposite of the stress response on our bodies
2. Humor relaxes the muscles
3. Humor improves circulation
4. Humor deepens respiration
5. Humor deepens the relaxation response
6. Increases tolerance to pain and discomfort
7. Humor decreases the level of stress hormones-dopamine, cortisol, and epinephrine
8. Humor contributes to the release of healthy chemicals in our bodies
   * D_Lysozyme-An antibacterial enzyme that kills germs
   * Catecholamine-The alertness hormone that helps us to learn, remember, and retain information
   * Endorphins- Give us a natural feeling of well-being, reduce pain, and reduce inflammation
8. Humor boosts the function of the immune system for up to 12 hours after hearty laughter
   * Increases the number of natural germ killing cells
   * Increases the number of Activated T cells
   * Increases the level of Gamma Interferon
   * Increases the level of compliment 3, which helps antibodies destroy infected cells
   * Increases the level of Antibody IgA which fights upper respiratory infections (colds)

PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF HUMOR AND LAUGHTER

“Humor is the ego’s victorious assertion of its invulnerability”- Sigmund Freud

1. Humor functions as a coping skill
2. Humor reduces stress and anxiety
3. Humor distracts attention from the negative
4. Increases tolerance
5. shifts perception to the positive
6. Helps release tension and nervous energy
7. Preserves psychological energy

SOCIAL BENEFITS OF HUMOR AND LAUGHTER

“Laughter is the shortest distance between two people”-Victor Borge

1. Humor enhances social relationships
2. Humor increases a person’s popularity, (as long as the expression is not hostile)
3. Humor promotes group cohesion
4. Humor relieves social tension
5. Humor can express social approval or disapproval in a safe manor
6. Humor relieves stress and antagonism within organizations

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SO… WHAT EXACTLY IS HUMOR?
Humor is defined differently by every person. It’s a personal thing. Webster’s Dictionary Definition: noun, that quality that appeals to the sense of the ludicrous or absurdly incongruous. The mental faculty of discovering, expressing, or appreciating the ludicrous or absurdly incongruous. Something that is designed to be comical or amusing.

“Humor is our best defense against the universe”
-Mel Brooks

Some other definitions include-
1. Things that make us laugh
2. Experiencing funny things
3. Surprises and incongruence in life
4. A stress reducer
5. A tension reliever
6. A part of the creative process
7. Silly and stupid stuff done on purpose
8. Acting crazy so you don’t go nuts
9. A biological process
10. Seeing things from a different point of view
11. An ego defense against the universe
12. A sign of higher intelligence
13. The joyful part of life
14. Being cheerful
15. Something that derails our train of thought
16. Finding happiness in everyday things

Funniness, comedy, comicality, laughter, ridiculousness, drollery, nonsense, silliness, jocularity, cheerfulness, jesting, joking, wittiness, gags, wisecracks, foolery, raillery, buffoonery, clowning around, , ludicrousness, incongruous, fanciful, fooling, farce, puns, satire, parody, witticisms, slapstick, smiles, laughing until milk comes out your nose, etc.

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USING HUMOR TO MAKE YOUR LIFE BETTER
TRY SOME HOPING HUMOR

Use hoping humor every day to keep life livable, light, and fun. Everything is a possible source of coping humor. Schedule this type of humor into your day. Pass it around to others.

Some examples include:

- Funny movies and videos
- Funny TV shows
- Reading the comics in the paper
- Calling up friends and laughing
- Laughing at things your kids and pets do
- ____________________________________
- ____________________________________
- ____________________________________

TRY SOME COPING HUMOR

Edgier and more risky, this type of humor helps us to deal with aspects of life that are stressing, frustrating, scary, or annoying. Sigmund Freud said: “Humor is the ego’s victorious assertion of its invulnerability”. Coping humor helps us to distance from the negative aspects of life by joking about them.

Some examples include:

- Joking about death or illness
- Joking about management, politics or religion
- Making fun of the stupid things that we do or that others do
- Sex jokes, dirty jokes and jokes about other social taboos
- Jokes about the confusing differences between men and women
- Making fun of people who are scary (i.e.: Osama Ben Laden, Saddam Hussain)
- ____________________________________
- ____________________________________
- ____________________________________

WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS…

TRY GALLOWS HUMOR

Gallows humor is sick or dark humor, which allows us to cope with the most difficult and upsetting situations. Use it at work to break tension and cope within the professional group. Just remember that it is for the work group alone. Never let clients or visitors hear it. Never take it home or share it with your family or they will consider it cruel and upsetting.

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How to Laugh Yourself Healthier

A dozen fun ways to put more humor and laughter into your life for better health!

1. Schedule fun and funny things into your life every day...like some play time, funny TV shows, funny videos, movies, and books. Spend time on a fun hobby.

2. Regularly, talk to friends, relatives or co-workers who make you laugh.

3. Get some humorous books from the library or bookstore and give yourself at least 30 minutes a day to read them.

4. When you read the newspaper or magazines, be sure to read the comics.

5. Play some board games or other fun activities with friends and family. (Try kite flying, slinkys, coloring books, blowing bubbles, croquet, bouncing an oversized rubber ball) Keep some funny props at work like Groucho Marks noses, kazoos, wax lips or wind up chattering teeth.

6. Have old time funny movie night at home. Try renting some old-time comedy movie videos, (Laurel and Hardy, Buster Keaton, Ma and Pa Kettle, The Three Stooges), or get the latest comedy movie on DVD or Netflix.

7. At work have a cartoon bulletin board, (away from where clients and visitors can see it). Pass around jokes at work and home. (Be sure to avoid sharing sexually or ethnically offensive humor). Put funny stuff in a joke file for later use.

8. Start a humor library shelf or basket, with funny books, tapes, videos, props, games, and toys, donated by staff. Employees and patients can take turns borrowing the materials. (Volunteers love to organize and maintain this type of project.)

9. Start staff meetings with a funny activity, a humorous reading, creative icebreaker, magic trick, or a “joke around”. Add humor and laughs to your planning sessions and problem solving meetings to increase morale and productivity.

10. Keep a funny calendar in your office, like The Far Side, Ziggy, Peanuts, or Dilbert. Keep a funny prop or a joke jar on your desk.

11. When something stressing happens, instead of loosing your cool, try to see at as a Blamo Moment, which you can laugh about later!

12. Smile at everyone you see. Smiling shuts off the stress response. You can fake it ‘till you make it by doing some “Laughtercises” every day! The quickest one is: Stand up straight; Inhale deeply; Smile as wide as you can; Exhale slowly.
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Laughtercises

Laughtercises are exercises that jump-start your sense of humor and stimulate smiles and laughter.

The Stress buster…
1. Stand, 2. Breathe, 3. smile, 4 repeat, “Alert mind-Calm body”.

Fake it ‘till you make it!
1. Flex your cheeks 2. Eyes 3. Forehead 4. Jaw
8. Slap your thigh 9. Now laugh till you cry!

Roller Coaster Laugh
1. Stand up and reach for your toes. 2. Raise you arms like you’re riding a roller coaster and laugh. 3. Keep laughing and shake your arms. 4. Reach for your toes again. 5. Keep up the movement and laughter for 15 seconds.

Making Funny Faces
1. Make the funniest faces you can at each other
2. Try the “American bat” face…lift nose with hand over head, stick out your tongue and go la la la la la la!
3. Try the “my face is caught in the elevator door” face…smash your face with the sides of you hands.

Just Simulate Humor to Stimulate Humor!
The Recycling Humor Exercise

1. Who is your favorite comedian?

2. Who is the funniest person you know?

3. What is your favorite funny TV show?

4. What is your favorite funny movie?

5. What is your favorite comic strip?

6. What is your favorite joke or one liner?

7. What is the funniest embarrassing thing that happened that seems funny now?

FIRST: TAKE 5 MINUTES TO WRITE DOWN THE ANSWERS TO AS MANY OF THE QUESTIONS THAT YOU CAN (WITHOUT TALKING TO ANYONE)

NEXT: COMPARE ANSWERS WITH THE GROUP. Who in the groups has a similar sense of humor to you?
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My Perfect Day Exercise:
If you had a day off, with no time constraints, no commitments, no obligations, and some money…What would you do with that day to make yourself happier?

- Sleep in
- Talk to friends
- Take a walk
- Work on a hobby
- Get a massage
- Go shopping for fun
- Spend time with loved ones
- Go out to eat
- Get a manicure
- Take a bubble bath
- Listen to your favorite music
- Read a good book
- Take a nap
- See a movie or play
- Watch your favorite TV Show
- Bake
- Do a puzzle
- Eat chocolate
- Go to church
- Meditate
- Spend time in nature
- Go dancing
- Have a party
- Play games
- Take a day trip
- Go to the beach
- Take a leisurely drive
- Get yourself flowers
- __________________________
- __________________________

How often do you get to do the things that you put on your list? These things replenish your energy and give your body, mind, and spirit, a message of love and life…schedule them into your life regularly if you want mental and physical health.
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The Attitude Breathing Exercise

--This Attitude Breathing exercise has been adapted from the book entitled Transforming

1. Focus on the heart as you breathe in. As you breathe out focus on the Solar Plexus, (the place about 4 inches below your heart, just below the sternum).
2. Practice breathing in though the heart and out through the Solar Plexus for 30 seconds. Focus your energy and attention there.
3. Now select a positive feeling or attitude to breathe in and out of those same areas for 30 seconds. (For example, breathe in love breathe out peace
4. Select attitudes to breather that will offset the negative emotion of imbalance of the situation you may be in.
5. Breathe deeply with the intention of shifting to the feeling of the attitudes you are breathing. You can breathe in an attitude of balance and breathe out an attitude of forgiveness. You can breathe in happiness and breathe out compassion. Try out different words as long as they are positive.

Practice different combinations of attitudes you want to develop. You can tell yourself, “Breathe genuine, breathe courage, breathe east, breathe gratitude”, or whatever attitude you wish.

Even if you cannot feel the attitude shift at first, making an earnest effort will at least help you get into a neutral state. In neutral, you have more objectivity and you save energy.

Change your attitude=
Change your feelings=
Change your behaviors= A Happier Life!
MY NOTES: