

**Humor Matters:
Clinical Applications of Humor in
Psychotherapy;
A Seriously Credible Approach
Brief Therapy Conference 2018**

with

Steven M. Sultanoff, Ph.D.
Licensed Psychologist

HumorMatters™

1 League #60961
Irvine, CA 92602
(714) 665-8801
(ssultanoff@humormatters.com)
www.humormatters.com



**The Therapeutic Power of Humor
The Impact of Humor**

Interpersonal Impact

- ✓ Builds relationships
- ✓ Increases social interactions
- ✓ Enhances communication
- ✓ Softens communication of desired behavior change
- ✓ Note: All of the above impacts are fundamental aspects of all psychotherapy.

The Therapeutic Value of Humor

- 👁️ Elements and Impact of Therapeutic Humor 👁️
What Makes Being "Tickled" Therapeutic?
- 👁️ The Model of Therapeutic Humor 👁️
- 👁️ Integrating Humor into Psychotherapy 👁️
Humor as a Diagnostic and Treatment Tool;
and Builder of the Therapeutic Alliance
- 👁️ Expanding Your Humor Quotient 👁️
Developing Humor Skills

**A Sign in a Department Store
Children who stray from their
adult companions will be given
candy, a train whistle, and a
puppy to take home.**

The Experience of Humor:

- ✓ Laughter
- ✓ Mirth
- ✓ Wit

**The Therapeutic Power of Humor
The Impact of Humor**

Intrapersonal Impact

- ✓ Feels good physically
- ✓ Feels good emotionally
- ✓ Generates positive physiological changes
- ✓ Changes how we act/Invites behavior change

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- ✓ Provides perspective--reframes

The Therapeutic Power of Humor
The **Physical** Impact of Humor

- ✓ Reduces physical stress—when we laugh, large muscles contract and relax, muscle control may be temporarily lost
- ✓ Energizes us:
 - Increases heart rate and increases respiration
 - Causes the diaphragm to contract
 - Activates skeletal, cardiovascular, circulatory, endocrine, muscular, and nervous systems

The Therapeutic Power of Humor
The Impact of Humor

Intrapersonal Impact

- ✓ Feels good physically
- ✓ Feels good emotionally
- ✓ Generates positive physiological changes
- ✓ Changes how we act/Invites behavior change
- ✓ Provides perspective--reframes
- ✓ Changes thinking and attitude
Helps us to be creative and to think outside the box

Levity
defies gravity.

As illustrated by Uncle Albert in Mary Poppins©

The Therapeutic Power of Humor
The **Intrapersonal** Impact of Humor (cont'd)

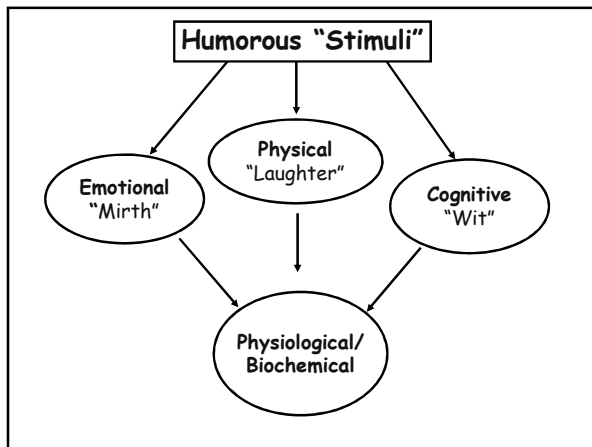
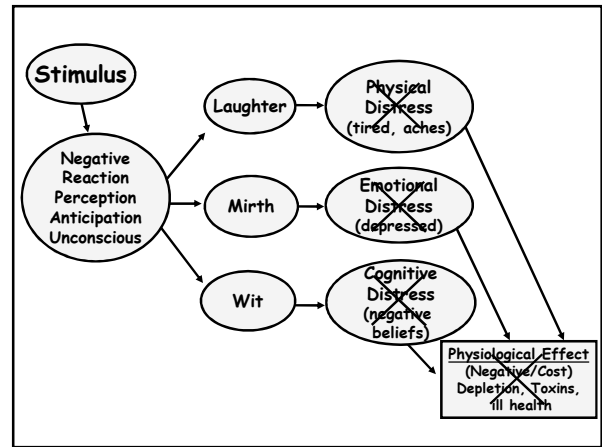
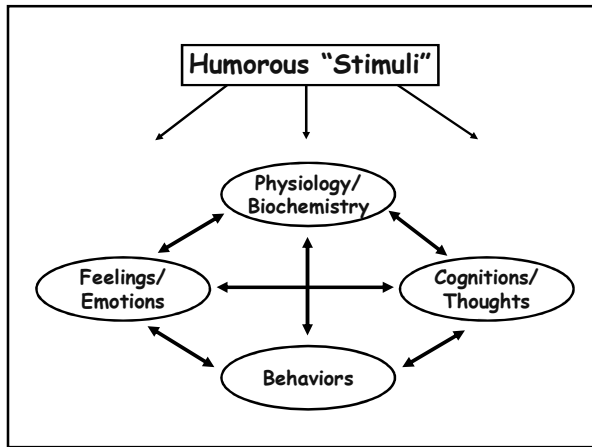
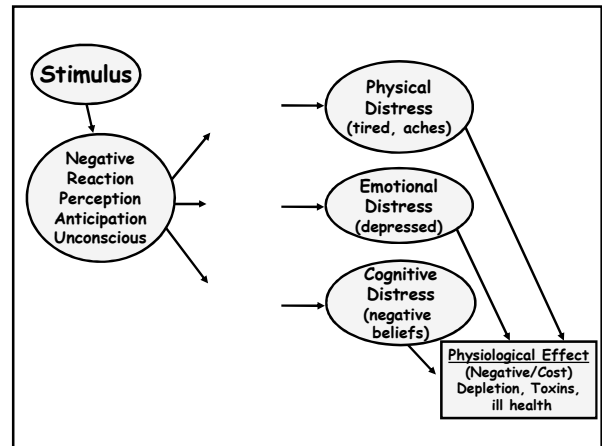
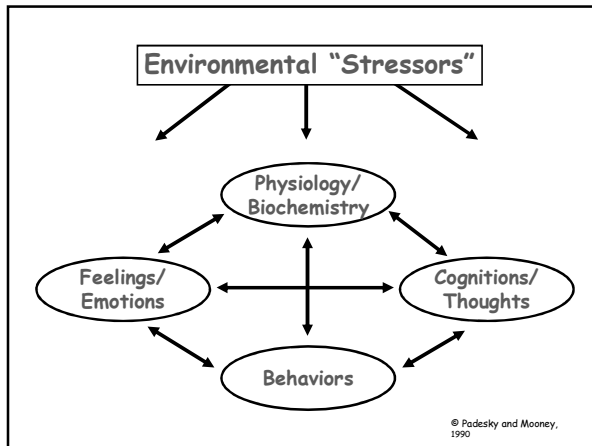
- ✓ Promotes attending and increases presence—when we are energized, we attend. Our sleeping minds are awakened
- ✓ Anchors memories
- ✓ Awakens other memories
- ✓ Helps us to deal with crisis situations:
 - Reduces interpersonal tension
 - Provides perspective
 - De-mystifies or de-emphasizes severity of a situation

A Client's Goals for Therapy

- ✓ I want to feel better

- and/or

- ✓ I want to act/behave differently



Humor changes biochemistry.

Research on Laughter

- ✓ There is no *published research* that has found a *direct link* between laughter and increased endorphin production.
- ✓ Increase in antibodies.
- ✓ Decrease in stress hormones.
- ✓ Increase in tolerance to pain.
- ✓ Heart patients experiencing 30 minutes of humor daily for one year:
 - Had fewer repeat heart attacks,
 - Had fewer repeat angioplasties, and
 - Needed less medication.

Humor is the healthy way of feeling a "distance" between one's self and the problem; a way of standing off and *looking at one's problem with perspective.*

Rollo May

He or she who laughs...
lasts.

Unknown

Humor changes
the way we feel.

Humor changes
the way we think.

A merry heart doeth good—
like medicine—but a broken
spirit drieth the bones.

The Holy Bible (King James Version)
Proverbs 17:22

Humor is the great thing,
the saving thing after all.
The minute it crops up,
all our hardnesses yield,
all our irritations and
resentments slip away,
and a sunny spirit takes their place.

Mark Twain

A Sign in a Restaurant

Children left unattended will be
towed at the owner's expense.

The experience of humor
and distressing emotions
cannot occupy the same
psychological space.

Steve Sultanoff

Doctors who use humor with
their patients have fewer
lawsuits filed against them.

Journal of the American Medical Association

Humor changes
the way we behave.

If you are too busy to laugh,
you are too busy.

Unknown

Using Humor in Psychotherapy

The author believes that the use of humor by the psychiatrist is potentially destructive to the psychotherapeutic relationship.

Humor has its place in life.
Let us keep it there.

Lawrence Kubie, 1971

Humor as a Treatment Tool

Humor can be used to build and strengthen the therapeutic alliance.

Demonstrate empathy and understanding

Humor can be used to facilitate communication by providing a non-threatening mechanism for the therapist to share a message, thought, concept, idea, etc. with the client.

Humor can be used to generate insight or awareness just as an interpretation might.

Using Humor in Psychotherapy

In order for a therapist to effectively use humor in the psychotherapeutic relationship, the humor must be intentional and purposeful and specifically designed (created) to benefit the client. The therapist must have some fundamental skill in the use of humor and in the addressing client's reactions to therapy interventions. The therapist must also experience the three core human qualities (empathy, acceptance, and genuineness), that are foundational to all psychotherapeutic relationships

Humor as a Treatment Tool

Humor can help clients resolve emotional distress, distorted cognitive patterns, and behavioral difficulties.

Humor can teach management of emotion and cognition

Humor can enhance the process of cognitive restructuring in therapies that assist clients to change thinking patterns. Humor can help clients identify and change negative attitude and distorted thinking.

Humor as a Diagnostic Tool

Humor can be used to assess the progress of cognitive restructuring in therapies that assist clients to change thinking patterns.

Humor can also be used to assess clients' resistance to change—emotional, cognitive, or behavioral. A client's negative reaction to the use of humor may indicate resistance to change.

Humor as a Treatment Tool

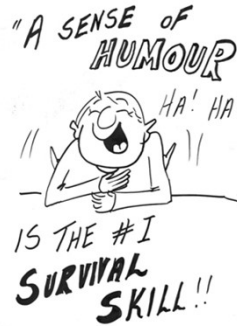
Clients can be taught humor aikido (the process of redirecting negative energy) as a model of changing negative and distressing viewpoints.

Humor can To assist clients to reframe negative or rigid thinking and activate perspective on life's situations.

Humor provides a vehicle for the therapist to be playful and teasing with the client and therefore, teach the client to receive teasing and be playful in his/her life.

Your Journey to Using Humor Therapeutically

- 1) Begin to use humor *Intentionally* (or at least consider using it) and *Purposely* (have a therapeutic reason to use humor.)
- 2) Become skilled in the use of therapeutic humor. Seek training opportunities. Prepare yourself to use humor. Practice activating your "Comic Vision."
- 3) Ask yourself, "How will this humorous intervention be helpful to my client."



Everybody's got
a laughing place.

Trouble is...
most folks won't
take the time
to look for it.

Br'er Rabbit

Your Journey to Using Humor Therapeutically

- 4) Maintain your "therapeutic" presence. Be empathic, accepting, genuine, and respectful.
- 5) Use your therapy skills to address the client's reaction (good or bad) to your use of humor.
 - Humor interventions require that the therapist respond to the client's *reaction* to the humor.
 - The humorous stimulus itself is far less important than the client's *reaction* to the humor.
 - Avoid apologizing for therapeutic interventions.

Training in Therapeutic Humor

- Receive humor
- Do/create humor
- See with comic vision
- Be selective when using humor—When you have a "humorous" moment choose to use or not to use humor
- Be active/practice using humor
- Record humorous moments
- Seek training opportunities and resources
- Be intentional and purposeful with your humor

Your Journey to Using Humor Therapeutically

- 6) Maintain your professionalism. Avoid getting caught up in your own humor. It feels good to be humorous but remember that your humor is for the client's benefit.
- 7) Be willing to *risk* using humor. Effective therapists consider the risk and examine what deters and what facilitates one's ability to offer humorous interventions. Trust your clinical skills to be able to address any client reactions.

Training in Therapeutic Humor

- Record Humorous Moments—Jokes, anecdotes, cartoons, etc.
- Be selective when using humor—When you have a "humorous" moment, choose to use or not to use humor

We should be proud of who we are.
Then we can laugh at ourselves.
Being natural—
being yourself—
goes right at the heart of humor.

Willard Scott

There to here...
Here to there...
Funny things are everywhere.

Dr. Seuss

Training in Therapeutic Humor

- The Prop-Position

Toys:

Wind-ups
Balls: nerf, koosh, etc.
Magic wands

Silly Things:

Clown noses
Mental floss
Groucho glasses
Fake IDs, etc.

Grin and
share it.



Training in Therapeutic Humor

- Seek Training Opportunities and Resources

Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor
www.aath.org
Attend local humor meetings-So Cal Chapter

The International Society for Humor Studies
www.humorstudies.org

HumorMatters
www.humormatters.com

Online Programs:
www.aatbs.com; Look for video programs