

## Humouring a Hurting Friend

By Patricia Morgan MA CCC

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If a key factor to increasing mental health is a sense of humour, perhaps we could all use a booster shot of smile and laugh. A growing number of people in the US have joined the American Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor acknowledging the power of humor to heal. In Canada they are joining the Canadian Association for Therapeutic Humour. Yet, you need not join these organizations, be a stand up comic or wear a red nose to use humour with a supportive friend. Humour can help us and our friends view a difficult situation from a different perspective.

We are emotional beings who experience joy and human suffering. The state of wellness includes feeling our pain and the ability to create more moments of joy, mirth and bliss. Patch Adams said, "When the woes of existence beset us we urgently seek comic relief. The more emotions we invest in a subject, the greater it's potential for guffaws." The lows and highs are valued when we add a dose of chuckle to a talk when our friend is "pouring her heart out." When this friend is depressed, ruckus humor is not a good idea; however, when she is in an up and open play state of mind, it could be just the thing to create a shift in thinking. "Share with me my sadness and I will share with you my joy."

Humour increases creativity, a necessary component to problem solving. It allows us to see our problems in a new light. When we experience the absurdity of life, we tend not to take the upsets of our life so personally. The truth will set you free and it is often very funny. My mentor, Gwendolyn Jansma, of Heartseek Gatherings says, "Life is wondrous and messy." A sense of humor develops as we mature and learn to laugh not only with others but also at ourselves.

If each of us increased our own light heartedness, we would benefit from many of the aforementioned outcomes. Then we could better help and encourage others from our own lived experience and silliness. Silliness in this context means "to be blessed." Spending time with children and animals can brighten anyone's world. Playing everyday at a passion is important for us all. Often a friend will cry until she laughs or laugh until she cries. Be supportive but joining in with the tears is not necessarily helpful; however, sharing in the laughter provides a wonderful moment of connection. If you've seen a winning comedy, share it with a friend. Disclosing your own faux pas can be humorous and normalizing for a troubled heart.

Commiserating with a friend is healing. You can tell your own funny story that connects to your friend's problem or others that you have heard. Here is a silly story to invoke laughter at the habit of many mothers who tend to become over involved with their children. A mother was pushing her grown son in a wheelchair when she saw a friend in a shopping mall. The friend said, "Hello Mary. I didn't

know your son couldn't walk." Mary answered, "He can walk, but isn't it wonderful that he doesn't have to?" Be supportive; empathetic and loving to a troubled friend while at the same time encourage her own good mental health and independence.

Humour needs to be used with caution. It is only appropriate when it is used in your friend's best interest, and not to show off your quick wit. Safe humor excludes racist, sexist or sarcastic comments. Beware of sarcasm as an expression of your own anger and aggression. A friend will give you clues. She should never feel slighted or be the brunt of a tactless comment for the sake of humour.

Comedy, humour and friendship have to do with the tragedies, absurdities, sufferings, truths, contradictions and conflicts in life. With effective, timely and sensitive humor in troubled times, a shift in perspective occurs. Feelings are acknowledged and then calmed. Humour is a powerful healer if in the smile of a loving and kind friend.

Patricia Morgan, Light Hearted Concepts  
Phone: 403-242-7796  
Email: [patricia@lightheartedconcepts.com](mailto:patricia@lightheartedconcepts.com)  
Website: [lightheartedconcepts.com](http://lightheartedconcepts.com)