Kentucky School of Alcohol and Drug Studies

Presents

The Therapeutic Benefits of Humor in Addictions Treatment

Presenter
Mark Sanders, LCSW, CADC
The Therapeutic Benefits of Humor: What the Research Says

Laughter and Pain

Laughter releases endorphins in the brain that fight pain.
The Therapeutic Benefits of Humor: What the Research Says Continued

Laughter and the Immune System

1. Laughter lowers cortisol levels and protects our immune system.
2. Laughter increases antibodies, which fight infection.
3. Laughter activates T-cells and prepares the body to fight foreign substances.

(Source: Laughter and the Immune System: A Serious Approach, by Lee Berk, Ph. D and Stanley Tan, M.D.)
Therapeutic Benefits of Laughter Continued

- Improves brain functioning and protects the heart
- Increase oxygen in the blood which encourages healing
- Reduces stress, depression, anxiety, and fear
- Elevates mood and increases energy
Laughter and Stress

“Laughter is God’s gift to human beings. You never see a cow laugh.”

Joan Rivers

Laughter can decrease stress, lower blood pressure, and decrease muscle tension.

(Source: “Neuro Endocrine and Stress Hormone Changes During Mirthful Laughter.” American Journal of Medical Sciences, 1990, 298:390-396.)
The Therapeutic Benefits of Humor: What the Research Says Continued

Humor and Health

“In a study of terminally ill patients, 4 out of 5 said they wished people would stop being so glum and joke with them!”

“For every 10 minutes I laughed, I had two hours of pain free sleep.”

Norman Cousins
The Therapeutic Benefits of Humor: What the Research Says Continued

1. Studies of cultures where people often live to be between the ages of 120-150 indicates that high esteem for old people and humor are key ingredients of longevity.

(Source: Longevity: Fulfilling Our Biological Potential, by Kenneth Pelletier)
2. Laughter gives the lungs a workout. When we laugh heartily, we take in six times more oxygen than when we are talking.
The Therapeutic Benefits of Humor: What the Research Says Continued

3. When we laugh, the heart pumps more, increasing blood circulation. According to Dr. Fry, 20 seconds of hearty laughter gives the heart the same exercise as 3 minutes of rowing.
The Therapeutic Benefits of Humor: What the Research Says Continued

4. People who laugh a lot have higher levels of immunoglobulin-A in their throats and nasal passages and come down with fewer colds than people who seldom laugh. One study found that new mothers who laughed a lot had fewer upper respiratory infections, and their babies did, too.

(Source: Humor Works, by John Morreall, Ph. D.)
Laughter as Prevention of Compassion Fatigue
Compassion Fatigue

1. The stress of caring too much
Compassion Fatigue Continued

2. Emotional residue as a result of working with those who suffer

3. Secondary trauma
Compassion Fatigue Signs

Loss of energy
Loss of hope
Loss of enthusiasm
Loss of the ideal
Spiritual distress – “Where is God?”
A shift in one’s world view

Laughter to the rescue!
Laughter and Mental Health
1. Humor raises endorphine levels in the brain and reduces emotional pain.

(Source: Margaret Caudell, M.D., Ph.D., Mind Body Clinic – Boston)
2. It is also believed that humor activates neurochemicals in the brain, such as dopamine, and thus acts as an antidepressant.
3. The emergence of a sense of humor is one of the signs of mental health and progress in therapy.

(Source: The Handbook of Humor, by Krieger)
Counselor Humor

“A sign that you enjoy life is a good sense of humor.”

Vanessa Williams Church

“A good sense of humor is one aspect of self-actualization.”

Abraham Maslow
The Therapeutic Benefits of Humor in Addictions Counseling

A goal of counseling is to help clients feel better and act differently. Many models of counseling attempt to reach this goal by interventions that focus on one of four areas: feelings; behavior; thinking; and biochemistry. Humor can affect changes in all four of these areas.
The Therapeutic Benefits of Humor in Addictions Counseling Continued

1. It is the great equalizer.

2. It brings the idealized counselor back to life.

3. It can decrease resistance.

4. It can decrease cross-cultural tension.
The Therapeutic Benefits of Humor in Addictions Counseling Continued

5. It can facilitate bonding between counselors and clients.

6. It can facilitate self-disclosure – by creating a friendly environment.

7. It can allow some relief from pain.

8. It can allow client to change how they perceive a situation.
The Therapeutic Benefits of Humor in Addictions Counseling Continued

9. It can ease some of the anxiety caused by taboo subjects.

10. It can provide insight.

11. It can decrease stress and anxiety.

12. It can make the therapeutic hour seem quicker.
Benefits of Laughter in Therapy Continued

13. Increases client talking and eye contact

14. Decreases client stigma

15. Helps client cope with loss and illness

16. Laughter is contagious. It facilitates bonding in group therapy

17. Laughter improves marriage and partnerships
“Someone asked me why I wear my wedding ring on the wrong hand. It’s because I married the wrong person.”
“Marriage is not Heaven and it’s not hell. It’s purgatory.”

Abraham Lincoln
Utilizing Humor in Counseling With Clients

Many counselors agree that the best humor by counselors is thoughtfully spontaneous, well timed, and takes into consideration who the client is. The goal should be to lessen client tension, increase client comfort, and/or to help the client gain insight. The primary purpose of humor is to benefit the client.
Utilizing Humor in Counseling With Clients Continued

Approaches

1. Planned spontaneity

2. Exaggerations

3. Changing dialects
4. Taking a “funny bone history”

A. What makes you laugh?
B. Do you like to tell jokes or hear jokes?
C. What kind of humor do you find unpleasant?
D. What kinds of things that make others laugh are not funny to you?
E. What are the funniest movies you have seen?
F. Who are your favorite comedians?
Utilizing Humor in Counseling With Clients Continued

5. Reframes

6. Offering a menu

7. Stories

8. Making fun of yourself
Utilizing Humor in Counseling With Clients Continued

9. The use of humor tools – movie clips, cartoons, anecdotes, signs, prompts, masks

10. Repeating a funny punch line
Utilizing Humor in Counseling With Clients Continued

11. Pointing out absurdities and illogical reasoning

12. The use of art

13. Role plays

14. Group activities
Humor in Group Therapy Auction

1. To be president
2. Peace of mind
3. A good pair of shoes
4. To smoke a joint
5. A gold mine
6. To influence the education of children
7. A new car
8. To snort cocaine
6 Types of Inappropriate Humor

1. Laughing at the client
2. Cheap shots
3. Put downs
4. Sarcasm
5. Racist and sexist jokes
6. When there’s not enough distance from the crisis.
When is Humor Inappropriate? Continued

- When the client is offended by it. (Micro-aggression)
- When it makes the client feel like they’re not being taken serious
- When it’s used so often it’s seen as boring
- When the counselor uses it to avoid dealing with the client’s or their own anxiety
- When it is inappropriately timed
"When I Was A Kid"

1. My favorite game was
2. My favorite food was
3. My favorite cartoon character was
4. My favorite song was
5. My favorite toy was
6. My favorite holiday was
7. My favorite teacher was
8. My best friend was
A police officer called the station on his radio. "I have an interesting case here. An old lady shot her husband for stepping on the floor she just mopped."

"Have you arrested the woman?"

"Not yet. The floor's still wet."
"please be dolphins, please be dolphins"
What makes you think

the kid is mine?
I told you not to use bleach

Shut up!
I did the math
we can't afford the dog
7 Cousins of Laughter

1. Love
2. Hope
3. Faith
4. Touch
5. Creativity
6. Good nutrition
7. Goals and a sense of purpose