



LAUGHTER IN SUPERVISION? You've Got to be Kidding

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The title of this article is not meant to suggest supervisory sessions should be a series of jokes or a comedy routine. Rather, the title suggests the possible relevance of optimism and humor in clinical supervision. This brief article cannot teach you how to be funny and will not try to convince you that laughter and humor are replacements for serious clinical discussions. However, humor can be an appropriate element in some supervisory relationships and an aid to personal mental health, in or out of the office.

Our work is demanding and draining. Persons we serve are in difficult and sensitive situations. Each day we may be asked to do more with less, so we must learn to utilize all of our available assets, and that includes an ability to laugh. Laughter, like hope, is sometimes difficult to find. However, it is reasonable to believe that where there is laughter, there is hope. Social work is serious and social workers' jobs are serious and

should be taken seriously, but the social worker does not have to take herself or himself seriously all of the time.

Humor is a valid and sometimes necessary component for coping. Too often it is ignored as a reliever of stress or overlooked as a way to build bridges between people. Humor and laughter can be a valuable aid in the maintenance of mental health and/or physical health, and it has no calories, harmful side effects, or artificial preservatives. The Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor (AATH) defines "therapeutic humor" as follows:

Any intervention that promotes health and wellness by stimulating a playful discovery, expression or appreciation of the absurdity or incongruity of life's situations. This intervention may enhance health or be used as a complementary treatment of illness to facilitate healing or coping, whether physical, emotional, cognitive, social or spiritual. (AATH, n.d.)

There are numerous resources on how to use humor in supervision and training on the AATH Web site. Another useful resource is The Learning Project Web site, which advises: **Joke telling [is] not the only way to transmit humor. Here are four tips:**

1. Put humor in the physical environment—by osmosis, it may filter into people's awareness. Use posters, sayings, etc.
2. Use humor as a tool rather than a weapon—laughing with others builds confidence, brings people together and pokes fun at our common dilemmas. Laughing at others destroys confidence, ruptures teamwork, and singles out individuals as the butt of a joke.
3. Build humor into the corporate culture. Ben & Jerry's established a Joy Committee offering Joy grants to their employees who have an idea that will bring more joy into the workplace.

4. Humor's bottom line—Tom Peters says, "The number one premise of business is that it need not be boring or dull. It ought to be fun. If it's not fun, you're wasting your life." Set the tone by modeling your ability to laugh at yourself and to tell stories on yourself. (The Learning Project, n.d.)

So maybe laughter in supervision isn't such an oxymoron.

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