



HOW HUMOR CAN LEAD TO MORE EFFECTIVE THERAPEUTIC OUTCOMES

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Improve your outlook and reduce harmful stress through humor. That's the message of this seriously funny workshop where you will get to practice applied therapeutic exercises that you can use every day to improve your wellbeing and the wellness of your clients and others around you.

Research has shown that accessing humor and laughter directly after a stressful situation reduces stress hormones and creates lasting, positive feelings. Muscles relax, breathing changes, and the brain releases endorphins, natural painkillers, and happiness boosters. Having a sense of humor and being quick to laugh can have psychological and physiological benefits.

Frustrated by work? Troubled by feelings of insecurity? Angry at the guy who stole your parking space? Don't let these frustrations pile up and push you toward burnout. Mallori and Lodge will teach you how to laugh off difficult times, and as a result turn the negative impacts of stress into the positive benefits of humor.

ABOUT THIS WORKSHEET

Follow along with all the exercises and activities below. When the workshop is over, please email your completed worksheet to dr.lodge.mccammon@gmail.com. We will randomly select a completed worksheet and that participant will receive one free [Reframe It Coaching](#) session.

PRE-WORKSHOP ACTIVITY: MOVIE QUOTES

While we wait for the workshop to begin, please fill in the blanks with your most absurd ideas and see if you can make yourself laugh. On the left, you will see a list of well-known movie quotes with words missing. Below each quote, you will see an absurd example that could replace that missing word. Fill in the empty spaces on the right with your absurd ideas. Something absurd is wildly unreasonable, ridiculous, or silly.

Movie Quotes	Your Ideas
Star Wars: A long time ago, in a [absurd] far, far away <i>Example: Starbucks</i>	A long time ago, in a _____ far, far away
Wizard of Oz: Follow the yellow brick [absurd] <i>Example: Hose</i>	Follow the yellow brick _____
Gone with the Wind: Frankly, my dear, I don't give a [absurd] <i>Example: Shih Tzu</i>	Frankly, my dear, I don't give a _____
Braveheart: They may take our lives, but they'll never take our [absurd] <i>Example: Credit cards</i>	They may take our lives, but they'll never take our _____
Jerry McGuire: You had me at [absurd] <i>Example: Donuts</i>	You had me at _____

INTRODUCTION ACTIVITY: WHAT'S IN A NAME?

- 1) Decide on an absurd name that you will go by during this workshop
 - Absurd name options:
 - Title + Favorite Food (e.g., Queen Medium-Rare Filet)
 - Pet's name + Piece of clothing + "Bottom" (e.g., Hudson Scarf Bottom)
 - Make up your own

My absurd name:

- 2) Change your name in Zoom

WARM UP ACTIVITY: JOKE OFF!

Complete the jokes below. Then, with a partner, take turns performing them. Try to make your partner laugh by experimenting with how you tell each joke.

Joke Number	Prompt	Your Ideas
Joke 1	I may look fine But deep down I just want to [absurd, one word]	I may look fine But deep down I just want to _____
Joke 2	I'm so out of shape that when someone yells, "Run for your life!" I yell back, "[Absurd]!"	I'm so out of shape that when someone yells, "Run for your life!" I yell back, " _____!"
Joke 3	Pro tip: Never make snow angels in a/an [absurd]	Pro tip: Never make snow angels in a/an _____
Joke 4	Don't be part of the problem Be [absurd]	Don't be part of the problem Be _____
Joke 5	Them: Where did you learn to dance like that? Me: [absurd]	Them: Where did you learn to dance like that? Me: _____

EXERCISE 1: PILE-O-PUNCHLINES

Punchlines are absurd statements that can add humor and diffuse tension when placed at the end of any sentence. What's interesting is that these punchlines can spark laughter even if they are non sequiturs, which are conclusions that may not logically follow from the previous statement.

Consider the statement, "I've had a really difficult day." What would be an absurd line that might follow that complaint? The challenge is to make sure that it does not make much, or any sense.

Examples:

- I guess I won't get my deposit back
- I blame public libraries
- Uh-oh someone spilled the SpaghettiOs
- That's the most dangerous game
- And then the sun exploded
- Asking for a friend

My favorite non sequitur punchline(s):

This exercise helps to establish a social contract within your community. Any community can work together to come up with a list of punchlines, like we have done here. Then we all agree that whenever someone says a punchline from the list, at any time, it is an invitation to laugh. These become low barrier, non sequitur, inside jokes. After establishing some funny punchlines, we all have a resource to

use whenever it seems helpful. For example, I might say, "I've had a really tough day...I blame public libraries!" We can all laugh and it immediately releases the tension of that frustration.

EXERCISE 2: THE COMEDY OF COMPLAINTS

Many times, when you complain, you take a problem, exaggerate it, and relive it out loud. Complaining floods your brain/body with cortisol, which is the stress hormone. What's more, complaining also increases the stress levels of everyone around you. It can be an unhealthy behavior. If you wrap all your frustrations in humor, you no longer complain, you tell jokes. Jokes can make everyone laugh, and when we laugh, it instantly reduces stress, which can be a very healthy behavior.

Examples:

- **Set Up:** Doing my hair takes too long and makes me sweat
 - **Punchline:** And yes, I knew my pants were off
- **Set Up:** Remembering my Wi-Fi password is impossible
 - **Punchline:** Thank goodness magic is real
- **Set Up:** My kids take their seatbelts off before I put my car in park
 - **Punchline:** I guess I won't get my deposit back

One line complaint:
Non sequitur punchline (from above):

Meme Tutorial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbWVHDI2InU>

Meme Website: <https://imgflip.com/>

When we write down our feelings, we tend to understand them more clearly. And if we struggle with stress, depression, or anxiety, creating a journal of those narratives, especially if we are wrapping them in humor, can be beneficial. It can help us gain control of our emotions and improve our mental health.

Extension Activity: Therapeutic Humor Exercises (Complaints)

Take your complaint from above and plug it into each humor exercise below. This is a quick and fun way to reframe our stressors/frustrations.

Prompt	Your Ideas
Forrest Gump: My mama always said life was like a box of [complaint]	Forrest Gump: My mama always said life was like a box of _____
This just in! [Complaint]	This just in! _____

Prompt	Your Ideas
One minute you're young and fun And the next minute you're [complaint]	One minute you're young and fun And the next minute you're _____
Not to brag or anything But I can [complaint] Better than anyone you've ever met	Not to brag or anything But I can _____ Better than anyone you've ever met
I am now [Complaint] Years old	I am now _____ Years old

EXERCISE 3: THE COMEDY OF CONTRADICTIONS

Our lives include an endless series of internal conflicts. We regularly face paradoxes (double binds, contradictions, ambivalences) with contradictory features. Now, it's not about judging which side of a paradox is right or wrong. It's about acknowledging that our lives are replete with these double binds, and then doing the work to accept that both sides can exist together.

It's actually really difficult to accept an internal contradiction (e.g., I love my job 😊 / I don't want to work 😡). Many of us want to think that there are right and wrong ways to be, and we effectively tell ourselves that half of our feelings are wrong because they contradict how we think we should be. That negative self-talk can put (or keep) me in a state of discontent.

One of the best ways to practice the acceptance of these ambivalences is to write them down and then add a non sequitur punchline.

I love my job 😊 / I don't want to work 😡 → [PUNCHLINE HERE]

Examples:

- **Set Up:** I want my kids to be self-sufficient / I do everything for them
 - **Punchline:** I guess I won't get my deposit back
- **Set Up:** I can do anything I want / I chose to do nothing
 - **Punchline:** That's why we can't have nice things
- **Set Up:** I want people to be vulnerable with me / I don't want to tell people my secrets
 - **Punchline:** So, I got married

My ambivalence:

Non sequitur punchline:

Our lives are filled with ambivalences and if we can write them down and laugh with them, it can help us accept them. Acceptance can stop the internal conflict and bring forward peace and contentment.

Extension Activity: Therapeutic Humor Exercise (Paradox)

Prompt	Your Ideas
Save the Earth! It's the only planet where [one side of an ambivalence], where [another side of your ambivalence], and where cats are in charge.	Save the Earth! It's the only planet where _____, where _____, and where cats are in charge.

Optional Break Video: [Write a Joke Like Ali Wong](#)

We've been creating a series of tutorials called Find and Replace (FNR). Each video is focused on looking closely at the methods of a famous comedian so we can see “behind the curtain” and do a little writing in their style. After you watch the tutorial, answer the questions and rewrite the joke by finding and replacing the details.

EXERCISE 4: SO I...

Humor is often made up of two parts; a set up (premise) and a punchline (twist). The premise is not funny but sets up an expectation. The twist is a surprising, unexpected conclusion. If it's a successful surprise, it will spark laughter. One way to do this is to first think about what would be an expected response, then think about what would be an extreme response, and finally, take it one step beyond extreme and think about what would be absurd. Unexpected absurdity often sparks laughter.

Examples:

- **Set Up:** I drove all the way to the grocery store and realized I forgot my wallet
 - **Punchline:** So I shook down some girl scouts for 20 bucks and it's totally okay because I used to be a Brownie.
- **Set Up:** One of my students turned in a paper that was clearly written by his mom
 - **Punchline:** So I asked my mom to grade it.

Prompt	Your Ideas
[Complaint] So I [absurd].	_____ So I _____.

EXERCISE 5: THIS, THAT...AND TACOS

In comedy, the rule of three is also called a comic triple. The third element of the triple is often used to create an effect of surprise, and is frequently the punchline of the joke. One way to generate a surprise is to make sure elements one and two are expected/logical. Then we break that expectation by making the third element absurd (wildly unreasonable, illogical, and a caricature of reality).

Examples:

- **Set Up:** I really need to find a man...
 - **Punchline:** who is kind, one who listens, and a third one who does not know the other two

- **Set Up:** When things feel overwhelming, remember...
 - **Punchline:** one thought at a time, one task at a time, and one 67-ounce bottle of Diet Coke at a time

Prompt	Your Ideas
[Complaint] But at least I [expected], [expected], [absurd].	_____ But at least I _____, _____, _____.

Remember that humor can reverse negative thinking by reframing our stressors. We can do this by absurdify-ing the third element in any list.

EXERCISE 6: SHALL I COMPARE THEE?

Many times, humor takes the form of comparing one thing to something surprisingly similar. We can generate that surprise by pointing out the most absurd/ridiculous comparison; one that is wildly unreasonable, illogical, and creates a caricature of reality.

Examples:

- “The sea was angry that day my friends, like an old man trying to return soup at a deli.” (George Costanza, *Seinfeld*)
- **Set up:** Arguing on Facebook is like
 - **Punchline:** stabbing a rock with a butter knife
 - **Tagline (optional):** there’s no point

Prompt	Your Ideas
[Complaint] is like [absurd]. [Tagline].	_____ is like _____. _____.

According to research, when humor is used to communicate difficult issues, it can help us cope. We can do this by comparing any frustration to something surprisingly similar.

Optional Break Video: [Write a Joke Like Jim Gaffigan](#)

We've been creating a series of tutorials called Find and Replace (FNR). Each video is focused on looking closely at the methods of a famous comedian so we can see “behind the curtain” and do a little writing in their style. After you watch the tutorial, answer the questions and rewrite the joke by finding and replacing the details.

EXERCISE 7: PUNCH THIS LINE

As we already know, humor is often made up of two parts; a set-up (premise) and a punchline (twist). The premise is not funny but sets up an expectation, creating tension. The twist is a surprising, unexpected conclusion. If it's a successful surprise, it will spark laughter.

Example:

- **Set Up:** I got to the wellness center today and realized I forgot my headphones.
 - **Punchline:** I guess I'll just listen to old guys breaking wind for an hour.

Prompt	Your Ideas
[Complaint]. [Punchline].	_____. _____.

Remember that frustrations make for excellent premises because they bring a lot of tension to our lives. The more tension that can be built in the set-up, the bigger laughs can be achieved with the punchline, which is designed to release the tension.

EXERCISE 8: PUNCHING UP PARADOX

One of the best ways to practice the acceptance of any paradox is to write it down and then punch it up. This effectively transforms the ambivalence into a joke.

Joke Number	Prompt	Your Ideas
Joke 1	I was in line at the grocery store and a woman told me that I look exactly like the type of person who would [one side of an ambivalence]. I thought, wow I actually would [other side of the ambivalence]. But I ended up saying, "Please just put the [absurd food item] in the bag."	I was in line at the grocery store and a woman told me that I look exactly like the type of person who would _____. I thought, wow I actually would _____. But I ended up saying, "Please just put the _____ in the bag."
Joke 2	I don't always tolerate [one side of an ambivalence] while I [another side of the ambivalence]. But when I do, I'm wearing [absurd outfit].	I don't always tolerate _____ while I _____. But when I do, I'm wearing _____.
Joke 3	There are three types of people in this world. Those who [one side of the ambivalence], those who [another side of the ambivalence], and [absurd].	There are three types of people in this world. Those who _____, those who _____, and _____.
Joke 4	The best way to deal with [one side of the ambivalence] is to [absurd], while the worst way to deal with [another side of the ambivalence] is to [absurd].	The best way to deal with _____ is to _____, while the worst way to deal with _____ is to _____.

Joke Number	Prompt	Your Ideas
Joke 5	[One side of the ambivalence] and [another side of the ambivalence] So I [absurd]	_____ and _____ So I _____
Joke 6	[One side of the ambivalence] and [another side of the ambivalence] But at least I [expected], [expected], [absurd].	_____ and _____ But at least I _____, _____, _____.
Joke 7	[One side of the ambivalence] and [another side of the ambivalence] at the same time is like [absurd] [Tagline]	_____ and _____ at the same time is like _____ _____
Joke 8	[One side of the ambivalence] [Punchline] [Another side of the ambivalence] [Punchline]	_____ _____ _____ _____

CONCLUSION

Remember that our lives are filled with ambivalences and if we can write them down and laugh with them, it can help us accept them. Acceptance can stop the internal conflict and bring forward peace and contentment.

How Will You Use These Skills? Please share one serious way you will use these exercises and one absurd way to use these exercises.

Interested in [Reframe It Coaching](#)? Please email your completed worksheet to dr.lodge.mccammon@gmail.com. We will randomly select a completed worksheet and that participant will receive one free session!

Contact Information

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