



when boys grow up too soon

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health & parenting

Laughing With Your Child

If your doctor said, "Take two jokes and call me in the morning," would you laugh? Let's hope so. Laughter is good for you and your child's mental and physical well-being.

Some mental health professionals say humor is one of the best ways to relieve stress, and research proves that laughter plays a key role in human life. A good laugh loosens muscles, lowers blood pressure, and may lower levels of hormones that create stress and weaken immunity. When you laugh, your body moves blood to your heart and lungs, boosting your energy level and making you feel better instantly. It also aids communication and creates a sense of closeness between you and the people you're laughing with.

Until recently, researchers knew that laughing was good for us, but they didn't really understand how. New evidence points to changes in the brain—not the imaginary funny bone—as the source for laughter. Researchers found that when people laugh, a part of the brain's reward system is triggered. In this reward system, a person feels pleasure and wants to have the same pleasant feelings over and over again. The areas in the brain triggered by humor are the same ones that are triggered by drugs like amphetamines and cocaine.¹

What does this mean for you and your child? According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, one reason that young people choose to use drugs is simply to feel good.² They seek new or thrilling things to have a good time. The good news is that the kids who use drugs to feel good are the ones who are most likely to respond to prevention messages that teach them about the harmful effects of drugs on their bodies. Teens also are swayed mostly by the powerful protective factor of having strong and loving parents who take notice and take part in all aspects of their lives. These kids have the best chances of being successfully taught to seek other ways of having fun.

Laughing and fun go hand-in-hand and laughing together as a family will bring you closer together, improve your mental and physical health, and may help prevent your child from using drugs. Look for laughs to stay healthy!

WebMD Public Information from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Sources

¹ 1 Dean Mobbs, Michael D. Greicius, Eiman Abdel-Azim, Vinod Menon, and Allan L. Reiss. 2003. Humor Modulates the Mesolimbic Reward Centers. *Neuron* 40: 1041–1048.

² National Institute on Drug Abuse. [Why Do Sally and Johnny Use Drugs?](#) , last referenced 3/9/04.

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