

Laughter can play an important role in well-being, research finds

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Laughter and humor are potent tools that can significantly impact our well-being, according to researchers from the University of Warwick.

Professor Dr. Stephanie Schnurr and Yanyan Li, at the University of Warwick's Department for Applied Linguistics, have shown how [laughter](#) and humor can be incorporated into our lives to achieve greater well-being.

Their research over the past 15 years on laughter and humor in both the workplace and in health-related circumstances show that they possess remarkable properties that can alleviate worry, diminish feelings of isolation, and instill a [sense of control](#) over one's mental and [emotional state](#), acting as a natural pressure valve.

Professor Dr. Stephanie Schnurr, Applied Linguistics at the University of Warwick says, "Laughter is an important channel to express feelings, show appreciation and create a positive atmosphere. Similarly, by embracing humor, individuals can find solace and resilience in the face of adversity."

Laughter and humor play a crucial role in enabling individuals to cope with novel and potentially overwhelming situations, and to create healthy and happy relationships. Humor provides an avenue to express the unsayable, allowing individuals to discuss topics around social, economic and environmental issues that are typically considered taboo, such as [financial issues](#), [mental well-being](#) and death.

Here are five ways laughter and humor can benefit well-being:

1. Helps us look on the brightside: Laughter and humor can be incredibly effective tools for providing a mental break from life's challenges. They allow individuals to adopt a more light-hearted viewpoint towards their circumstances. By finding humor, and even laughing in difficult situations, we can remind ourselves and those around us that the situation may not be as bad as we think. Laughing at disagreements and troubles among colleagues at

work, for example, helps them to overcome these issues and lays the foundation for more productive and collaborative working together.

2. **Take back control:** Laughter has the remarkable ability to empower us and give us a sense of control, transforming us from feeling like helpless victims to individuals in charge of our situations. Laughing at and making fun of one's outsider status in a work team is another example of this powerful function of humor. By embracing the power of humor and laughter, we're able to navigate challenges with confidence. Moreover, laughter serves as a valuable outlet for [emotional expression](#), promoting overall mental and emotional well-being.
3. **Release our stress values:** Humor, especially when used with irony and sarcasm, plays a crucial role as a release valve, enabling individuals to effectively relieve stress and tension. By embracing the power of laughter, we find a much-needed outlet to lighten the weight of everyday challenges. Engaging in humorous exchanges allows us to temporarily detach from the seriousness of life and work, offering a momentary respite and a fresh perspective.
4. **Change our perspective:** Humor is a powerful tool that can challenge and change the way we think about issues that impact our well-being. It can change the way we see things and offer new ideas. In the medical context, humor is often used to put patients at ease, and used to tackle difficult or sensitive conversations, for example on their unhealthy lifestyle, and their lack of engagement with the prevention and treatment plan. Professor Stephanie Schnurr adds, "Humor creates a new version of reality that is easier to live in, less scary, and less likely to cause fear. Used by women in male dominated professions to make fun of their outsider status, humor enables them to criticize and challenge the status quo without putting others off or offending them. Humor can also help people criticize their boss

and communicate alternative views without running the risk of being shot down for disagreeing with the boss."

5. Bring people together: Laughing and having a sense of humor can help bring people together and build positive relationships. In the workplace, this is particularly useful in job interviews where creating a good relationship with the interviewers and signaling belonging are important for success. Although making fun of and laughing at someone could be hurtful, laughing with (rather than at) can show that you understand and like your colleague, and it can make both of you feel better and happier.

Yanyan Li, Ph.D. student, Applied Linguistics at the University adds, "Sharing a laugh is an excellent way to display affiliation and togetherness. Especially in a workplace context where often expectations and pressures are high, humor and laughter are useful tools to improve well-being and to make our own—and our colleagues' lives—a little more enjoyable."

World Well-being Week returns on 26 June to 2 July 2023 to celebrate the many aspects of well-being, from meaningful, purposeful work to financial security, physical, mental and [emotional health](#), social resilience and empathic corporate and civic leadership, community relations and care for the environment.

Provided by University of Warwick

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