WHAT EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HUMOR & LAUGHTER

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Here is a summary of what we know (and don’t know) about the effects of humor, mirth, and laughter based on the research to date. Humor is the cognitive perception of playful incongruity. Mirth is the positive emotion that accompanies humor. Laughter is the respiratory-vocal behavior that communicates this emotion to others. The first list presents WHAT WE KNOW according to the research. The second lists WHAT WE DON’T KNOW YET, which expresses common beliefs in need of a firm scientific foundation in order to be promoted to the WHAT WE KNOW list. These lists will be updated periodically as new research findings are published.

WHAT WE KNOW

Humor (when used appropriately and sensitively)

1. Reduces stress, anxiety, and tension
2. Promotes psychological well-being
3. Raises self-esteem
4. Improves interpersonal interactions and relationships
5. Builds group identity, solidarity, and cohesiveness
6. Enhances memory (for humorous information)

Mirth

7. Increases pain tolerance
8. Elevates mood
9. Increases hope, energy, and vigor
10. Counteracts depression and anxiety
11. Enhances creative thinking and problem-solving
12. Increases friendliness and helpfulness

Laughter

13. Intensifies mirth
14. Is contagious (induces mirth in others)
15. Increases interpersonal attraction and closeness
16. Exercises respiratory muscles
WHAT WE DON’T KNOW YET

Humor

1. Reduces respiratory infections
2. Treats asthma
3. Enhances positive lifestyle choices
4. Improves diabetes
5. Increases longevity

Mirth

6. Improves immune function
7. Raises endorphins
8. Treats cancer
9. Fights off infections

Laughter

10. Lowers blood pressure
11. Reduces heart disease
12. Exercise benefits equal to jogging
13. Leads to significant weight loss
14. Whether children laugh more frequently than adults.

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