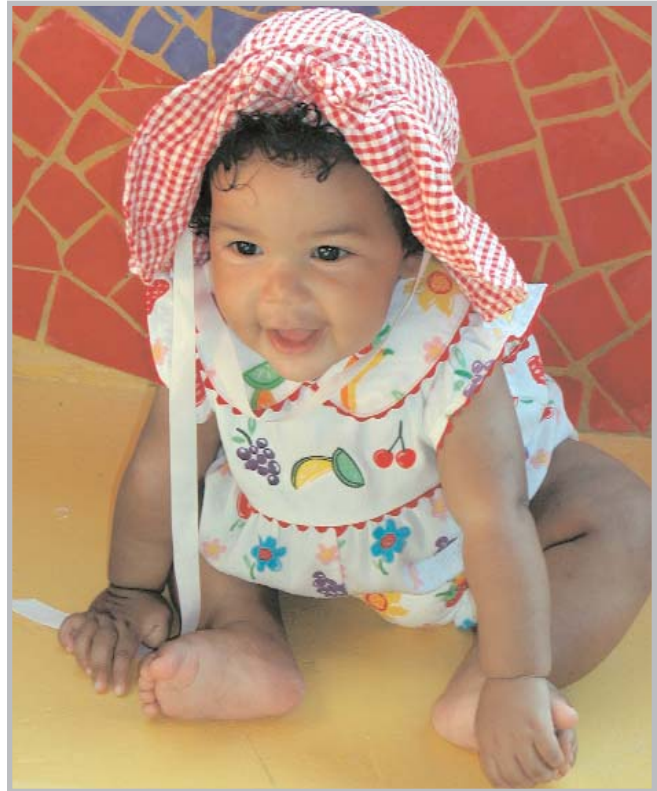


A Sense of Humor Is No Joking Matter

Where does a sense of humor come from? It appears that it is learned, rather than inherited, and that parents can help children develop a healthy sense of humor. There are many valid reasons you should take the time to do so.

Laughter and humor have intellectual, social, emotional and even physical benefits. A sense of humor is a form of intellectual play and much of that has to do with language development. When children begin to understand words and their meanings, they eventually discover homonyms, words that have the same sounds or spellings but mean something different. They then begin to play with these words and may suddenly take up an interest in riddle books or making up their own riddles, so they can make people laugh. This drive to bring joy to others begins early, before your child may understand what a riddle is. You may have experienced your child, when trying to imitate an older sibling, telling a riddle that makes no sense. She has an understanding of the joy humor can bring to others but doesn't quite have the language skills for it. Luckily, the jokester is usually the first to laugh, making us laugh, spurring on her future attempts. Her will to bring others joy has motivated her to understand language and she will eventually tell a truly funny joke.

Laughter also has many social benefits. People who make others laugh are seen as more sociable, and if they have a well developed sense of humor, make others around them more comfortable. This ability makes it



easier for your child to make friends. Other children are naturally attracted to things that bring them joy, and so become attracted to anyone who can make them laugh. Having others attracted to you and wanting to play with you is a natural builder of self-esteem.

Having a well-developed sense of humor is also a great way for your child to deal with the every day stresses of life, those things which are completely out of her control but happen none the less. If attention is paid to those things and approached with a sense of humor, your child learns to use humor as a coping skill. While these skills won't be totally in place until adulthood, laying the ground work for this development begins very early in life.

While there is very little research on humor

and the effects it has on your child's health, we know that adults who have a positive outlook on life and a sense of humor about difficult health situations heal faster. (Sharon Jayson, *USA Today*) This skill is a marvelous gift to give to your child. The power to be part of healing oneself will spread through all areas of the child's life.

Supporting Children's Funny Bone

It's never too early to start laughing with your child. Infants, while they don't yet have the ability to play with language, do share in contagious laughter. They also respond to things that are surprising and different. Peek-a-boo is a game that infants love, because of its element of surprise. Fingerplays like "This Little Piggy" that tickle baby physically usually bring a smile and giggle. As your infant nears 18 months to two years he will begin to get used to routine and a break from normalcy will be considered funny. If you put your hat on your foot, a two year old may think it very funny. If you try to stick your spoon on your nose, toddlers will think it's just hysterical. Any minor change from what a child thinks is normal can be considered funny. A disposable diaper worn as a hat can be

a delightful break from your routine.

Be careful with sensitive toddlers. If we change something too much, the funny joke becomes scary. If you comb your hair straight up in the air, you're likely to get a good laugh. But if you cut your hair, dye it and change your make-up, your toddlers may break down in tears. Toddlers like small breaks from routine. If you change their reality, it rocks their world a bit too much.

From age two to five, anything that doesn't make sense to a child is funny. A fish in a top hat and tuxedo, or an elephant cooking pancakes is humorous. During this time a child's language skills allow him to communicate things that are incongruous and this opens a whole new world. Words themselves become things to play with. Introducing humorous poetry during these years is a great hit. Add riddle books to your library along with silly picture books that have illustrations that engage your child's new sense of the strange or odd. Brush up on your knock knock jokes. Laugh at the jokes that don't quite make sense to encourage further language exploration.

Get ready for the bathroom humor that goes hand in hand with potty training, and remember that humor can help decrease

the stress your child may feel about this issue. It's O.K to laugh at their "poopy" jokes. Your child wants you to laugh. If the bathroom humor is used in inappropriate circumstances, simply don't laugh or react at all. The behavior will soon fade away.

Always encourage children to laugh and be silly and when you hear, "*What flowers do you wear every day? ...Two Lips.*" laugh and celebrate. This little comedian just made a tremendous leap in his intellectual and social development.

Paul McGhee, *Understanding and Promoting the Development of Children's Humor*, Kendall/Hunt 2002

Dr. C. Flatter, Dr. J. Herzog, Dr. P. Tyson, K. Ross, *A Look at Humor in Children Through the Years*, www.sesameworkshop.org, 2006

Great Riddle Books

Knock, Knock! Who's There? My First Book of Knock Knock Jokes
by Tad Hills

Eight Ate: A Feast of Homonym Riddles
by Marvin Terban

Riddles
by Pam Rosenberg

Songs and Fingerplays To Tickle a Funny Bone

Boom, Boom, Ain't it Great to Be Crazy?

A horse and a flea and three blind mice,
Sat on a curbstone shooting dice.
The horse he slipped and fell on the flea,
"Whoops," said the flea, "There's a horse on me!"

Chorus

Boom, boom, ain't it great to be crazy,
Boom, boom, ain't it great to be crazy,
Giddy and foolish the whole day through,
Boom, boom, ain't it great to be crazy?

Way down south where bananas grow,
A flea stepped on an elephant's toe,
The elephant cried with tears in his eyes,
"Why don't you pick on someone your size?"

Chorus

Way up north where there's ice
and snow,
There lived a penguin and his
name was Joe,
He got so tired of black and white,
He wore pink slacks to the dance
last night.

Chorus



I Can Make a Baby Smile

I can make a baby smile
When I tickle her toes.
(Tickle baby's toes.)
And I can make a baby laugh
When I tickle her nose.
(Tickle baby's nose.)



Down By the Bay

Down by the bay,
Where the watermelons grow,
Back to my home,
I dare not go.
For if I do, my mother will say,
"Did you ever see a bear,
Combing his hair?"
Down by the bay.

Repeat with the following phrases
and then make up your own.

"Did you ever see a bee,
With a sunburned knee?"
"Did you ever see a moose,
Kissing a goose?"
"Did you ever see a whale,
With a polka dot tail?"



Wiggle



I wiggle, wiggle, wiggle my fingers.
I wiggle, wiggle, wiggle my toes.
I wiggle, wiggle, wiggle my shoulders.
I wiggle, wiggle, wiggle my nose.
Now no more wiggles are left in me,
So I will be as still as I can be.

Follow the verse and have
the children wiggle all their
body parts.



Silly Projects and Activities

You can be silly and learn science. The following recipes are for children who are not putting things in their mouths. Do not share these projects with your infants or toddlers who may think that it's food.

Science Recipes

Silly Putty

Silly Putty is fun to mold and can be pressed into newspaper print to pick up images.

1 cup Elmers Glue
1/2 cup of liquid starch

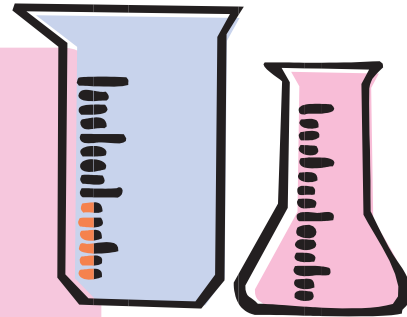
Pour glue into a small bowl. Add 2 Tablespoons of the liquid starch. Continue adding the starch, kneading until a smooth putty is formed.

Flubber

3/4 cup warm water
1 cup Elmer's Glue
food coloring

2 tsp Borax
1/2 cup warm water

Stir 3/4 cup water, Elmer's Glue and food coloring together. Mix the Borax and 1/2 cup warm water and stir well. Add the mixture together and watch the Flubber form.



Silly Walk

Get dressed in jackets and boots. Take a silly walk. Find a hill to roll down and a puddle to walk through. Find an open field and spin around in circles until you drop to the ground. Just have fun for fun's sake.

Face Paint and Make-up

What child has never gotten into Mom's make-up and then modeled her new look. Children love face paint. You can purchase face paints at most hobby and craft stores. Make sure it is non-toxic and FDA approved. You can also use very inexpensive make-up purchased at your local pharmacy. **Do not allow your child to use pointy eye or lip pencils.** Stick with powders with brushes, creams and lipsticks. Face paints are applied with a brush, make-up with its supplied applicators. The

first time, paint your child's face as she requests. After that allow her to play, making up her face as she wishes.

Note: Both make-up and face paint can stain your furniture. Make sure your child is cleaned up before you allow her to play on cloth upholstery.



Freeze

Freeze is an old game that always makes toddlers laugh. Put some music on and tell your child to dance. The faster and sillier the music the more fun he'll have. Explain when the music stops he has to stay perfectly still. After a few times he'll understand what to do. Don't keep the music off too long. Your toddler won't freeze for more than two - three seconds.

All About Town

Irish Soda Bread

Celebrate St. Patrick's Day with this traditional Irish Soda Bread Recipe.

4 cups all purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
2 Tablespoons sugar
2 Tablespoons butter melted
1 cups raisins, currants or cranberries
1½ cups buttermilk

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Blend the flour, baking soda, salt and sugar in a large bowl.

In a smaller bowl, mix the butter, buttermilk and raisins. Add to the flour mixture and mix only until just blended. Knead dough on a floured surface until smooth.

Place on a greased baking sheet. Cut a cross ½ inch deep along the top of the loaf. Bake in the preheated oven 40 - 45 minutes. Cool thoroughly before slicing.

Read Aloud Books for March

**A Light in the Attic and
Where the Sidewalk Ends**
by Shel Silverstein

No one combines children's humor and poetry better than Shel Silverstein. His books have become staples in every child's library. These are great bedtime books for those children who have made the linguistic leap into the world of word play. (ages 3 - adult)

Protecting That Giggly Grin

Good childhood dental care can relieve your child of painful dental problems later in life. The following preventive care will keep your child's big grin in great shape.



1. Begin caring for your baby's teeth as soon as they erupt through the gums. This is true for both nursing and bottle fed babies. They now make toothpaste that is palatable for sensitive tastebuds. Use a soft baby toothbrush and be gentle on gums. Make sure you don't cause any discomfort during toothbrushing sessions.
2. When babies are very young they often fall asleep while suckling a bottle or nipple. As soon as their teeth erupt you should try to avoid this. Mother's milk or formula lying on baby's teeth can eat away at tooth enamel.
3. Do not let toddlers walk around all day with sweet juice or milk. Water is a healthy alternative between meals.
4. As soon as baby's teeth erupt, get into the routine of brushing after breakfast and before bed. Beginning these routines early will set up a healthy lifelong habit.
5. Visit a good pediatric dentist when your child is one year old. A pediatric dentist will go to any lengths to make sure your child is comfortable. That comfort will reduce the fear a child can otherwise experience and make future dental visits much easier.

Just Silly Stories

Wiggle by Doreen Cronin

Toddlers will giggle at this story about wiggles. A friendly pup wiggles out of bed and then proceeds to wiggle through the day. At breakfast he winds up with a pancake on his head, but he's undaunted and is illustrated wiggling in his polka dot boxers a few pages later. Black outlined pastel drawings are layered with an occasional photograph, giving the artwork a fresh contemporary look. This book is sure to get everyone wiggling while awaiting the arrival of Spring. (ages 2 - 5)

Chicks and Salsa by Aaron Reynolds

Day after day the farm animals on Nuthatcher farm eat the same feed. The rooster takes charge of the situation and learns how to make salsa while watching a cooking show through the farmhouse window. The ducks add to the salsa, choosing garlic and spices from the garden and add a bit of guacamole. The author concedes within the text of the story, that he doesn't know where the guacamole or the chips came from, adding to the unquestionable silliness of the story. Inspired by the smells, Mrs. Nuthatcher decides to make tamales and uses up the rooster's ingredients. Refusing to return to their boring diet, the rooster finds a cookbook and begins to explore French cuisine. The animals look as hysterical in their chapeaus as they did in their Mexican party hats. The colorful illustrations are filled with comical animals in unlikely situations. Children will discover something new to laugh at during each reading. (ages 3 - 6)

Animals Should Definitely Not Wear Clothing by Judi Barrett

As soon as children understand the difference between animals and humans they'll understand the humor in these beautifully drawn pictures. A short phrase on the left hand side proves why the title of the book is true. On the right hand side, the animal dressed most inappropriately shows us how silly it would be for animals to dress as humans. The last page reads, "and most of all, because it might be very embarrassing." The picture beside the explanation shows an elephant in a brightly flowered dress and green hat, looking over a fence at a woman dressed in the same outfit. A short silly book perfect for your toddler or your coffee table. (ages 18 mos. - adult)

How Do Dinosaurs Clean Their Rooms? by Jane Yolen and Mark Teague

Those ferocious dinosaurs certainly look silly picking up all their teddy bears and trying to hide them under the bed. But well behaved dinosaurs don't hide their mess. They line up their little cars, put their clothes in the hamper and sweep up the dust. You can't help but giggle at the big clumsy dinosaurs using tiny brooms and dusters. But those creatures are very proud when Mom notices their hard work. A very silly way to get a toddler to pick up his toys. (ages 1 - 4)

WARMLINE

Providing you with practical, accurate information on health, behavior issues and regulatory information relating to the children in your care.

1-800-713-9006



Directory

Montclair Office
973-744-4050

Newark Office
973-297-1114



Childcare Matters

March 2006
Newsletter 88

Writer/Editor

Elizabeth A. Allen

Copy Editor

Simona Bana
Susan Boyle

Page Layout

Elizabeth A. Allen

Distribution

Simona Bana
Family Childcare
Department

Published by

Programs for Parents
Barbara Fedoroff, CEO
20 Church Street
Montclair NJ 07042
973-744-4050

Childcare Matters (copyright pending) is a monthly newsletter published for Registered Family Childcare Providers and parents using their services.