

Laughter Antidote and Modelling

In an earlier article we talked about helping your child to discover what it is they are good at; their "Island of Competence". This is a very important part of helping our young people to feel good about themselves. It is also important for their emotional wellbeing to experience fun and laughter. As they become "too old" to play chasings, be tickled, and engage in silliness, our children often forget how to laugh. Cindy Lauper made us all smile the 80s as she belted out, "Girls, they wanna have fun" and she was right, but "Girls oughta have fun" is closer to the mark. In our work with teenage girls who are grappling with the challenges and changes that occur in ado-lescence it is increasingly clear that many no longer engage in things that really make them laugh. For some, life seems so serious; they have forgotten how to have fun.

Not only is laughter is an awesome antidote to stress, pain and conflict, it is a power-ful protective factor. A good laugh has an amazing capacity to bring the mind and body back into balance. It can connect you to others and enhance relationships, supporting both emotional and physical health.

There is evidence to suggest that laughter can help you to relax. It relieves emotional stress and can help to shift perspective. Shared laughter is an effective tool for keep-ing relationships alive. It creates vitality and resilience and has the power to unite people when things get tough.

If things are tense at home, think about ways you can incorporate humour and play into your daily interactions with your children. Try watching a funny movie together, ask around the dinner table "what was the funniest thing that happened to you to-day?" Goof around and share funny stories. Pets are also a really good source of family antics and stories. Get into the 'Sing Star' or go bowling together.

Modelling a sense of fun to your children helps them see a lighter side of life. Be prepared to laugh at yourself, and to see the funny side when embarrassing things crop up. Making the effort to lighten the emotional load will help your struggling teenagers to see things in perspective, to roll with the punches and feel less stressed.

Don't wait until they are closeted away in their rooms with earphones in and eyes glued on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. This certainly makes it harder but not impossible. Start early and make it part of your family way of doing things, part of your ritual. Make it something they don't want to give up, not something they have to start doing. It's never too late. Laughter really is the best medicine.

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