



Leading Laughter with Children

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Working with kids is GREAT! You can have the most fun, creative, and sometimes the most heart-warming experiences imaginable. You don't need to put on a clown nose or wear funny shoes or show comedy movies – far from it! Doing things like this can actually distance you from the kids (putting them into their Judgmental Mind, as they think, “I don't like clowns,” or “I already saw that scene”). As with all Laughter Yoga, all you have to do is *Be Yourself* (their friendly Laughter Coach), encouraging and supporting them to have fun and enjoy themselves.

Kids are actually usually the *easiest* to get laughing, because once they realize that it is really okay to have fun and laugh (and that they are not going to be judged as silly or wasting time), they are usually Ready, Willing and Able to *Go For It!*

All we need to do is set it up so they know it is safe to be expressive, and then let them run with the ball.

You do want to give the same advice you'd give to all groups: “No pain; participate/play at your own level; we laugh *with* (not 'at') each other; refrain from talking until we're done.”

As they get older (12 years or so) it may be helpful to separate them by AGE or GRADE LEVEL. (For example, a High School Senior, concerned about how they look in front of their peers, may have issues laughing wholeheartedly with a freshman from the same school.) In some cultures, division between genders may also be necessary. Divide High (and possibly Junior High) School-age kids into the same grade level or age (so one session would be for “All Sophomores”, another would be “All Seniors”). This “separating” is a judgment call on your part - you may be lucky to find that some kids (especially those with experience as babysitters or otherwise working with all-ages) are perfectly comfortable laughing with other kids of all grades, ages, colors, and sizes. But it may be wise to err on the side of caution here, especially at first, and keep the adolescent and near-adolescent kids divided into age-specific or grade-specific groups.

In this way we alleviate the concerns of their Rational Minds so there is a minimum of Evaluating/Judging going on, leading to a greater level of Participation and Fun.

So...

The Secret to Success in Laughing with Kids is:

FOLLOW-THE-LEADER (You go first)

Instructions:

Stand at the front with all the others standing in a mass, facing you; they are like a standing audience, but (ideally) everyone is at the same height level. Instruct the students to copy you or whoever is doing the laughter exercise. All they have to do is imitate the person who is laughing at the front of the room.

Model doing some fun (but not *too* silly) laughter exercises/moves for just a few seconds, such as: playful "Naughty Naughty"(Argument Laughter), different kinds of Laughter-Dances, Penguin, Santa Claus, Slumber Party, Milkshake, Hearty Laughter. Avoid sexual stereotypes like Striptease Dancer or Macho Weightlifter.

After you've been the leader for about 10 seconds, pick a playful-looking student to come up and take a turn as the next leader. After this person has done some movements and laughter (while being copied by the others) for 5 to 15 seconds, let them go, by saying something like, "Okay; great, Friend! And the next leader will be..." and then pick another person to come up.

It may occur that the youngster who is leading will pick the next person to come up. This is perfectly fine. Just manage it so that everyone gets a turn that wants to, saying something like, "Everyone gets a turn; who's next?" Avoid having the same few people coming up and leading.

Because the kids are choosing their own level of expression, they can be as demure or robust as they wish, and are not going to feel embarrassed. And because the others are just copying the leader (again at *their* selected level of enthusiasm or shyness), they are also "in the Power Seat" of their own experience so they need not feel embarrassed or put "on the spot."

Of course, if some child simply does not want to participate, we would honor that, and just move on to the next person.

Four-Star Suggestion: Keep your thinking cap on and a note pad handy! When you support kids in being creative with this much encouragement, some wonderfully brilliant and fun things are likely to occur, so you may come up with some great new laughter exercises!

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