A Father's Laughter

Sharing the Fun and Joy of Childhood



You know the terrific feeling you get from laughing when you hear a funny joke, read a humorous story, or watch a hilarious comedy. Even remembering it later can put a smile on your face. Children feel great too when laughter is part of their lives.

At times, it is easy for fathers to take themselves too seriously. And so many interactions between fathers and their children are to correct or direct the young ones. While maintaining discipline in your household is important, you can be more than an authority figure to your children. Fun and fundamentals can coexist happily.

Laughter is not primarily about humor, but about social relationships. Laughter establishes, or restores, a positive emotional climate and sense of connection among people. The stronger the connection between a father and his children, the more likely the children will accept and follow the father's guidance.

Laughter can improve family relationships. Being able to laugh with your family can open the lines of communication between you and your children. The closeness you develop through laughing together will take your day-to-day dialogue beyond the smiles. Children will be more comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings—even admitting mistakes—which can be the starting point for important conversations about conduct and character.

Take Time to Be a Dad Today

Just like yawning, laughter is contagious. The laughter of others is irresistible. So look for ways to add spontaneous laughter to your family's everyday activities. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Spend time with your children, viewing the world from a child's perspective. Read their books aloud, scan the Sunday comics together, watch the TV shows they like, play their video games (they might even let you win one), and listen to their stories about school, friends, sports, or whatever is important to them right now, no matter how many times you may have heard the same stories.
- Start a new family tradition by celebrating April Fool's Day. Some fathers and their children plan practical jokes and gag gifts for weeks in advance in a fun competition to be the best prankster. One dad found salt in his non-dairy creamer when he made his morning coffee on April 1 (the sugar looked suspicious too), and discovered cat food and doll shoes in his coat pocket as he left for work.
- Add fun to your children's lives year round with a joke of the day. Check magazines, books, and comic strips to build an inventory of age-appropriate jokes. Select one joke each day. Write the joke on a sticky note to tuck into your child's lunch bag or send it in a text message to an older child with a cell phone.
- Use phones, e-mail, links to appropriate Web sites, and other interactive technologies to spread humor if you are a father who travels frequently, is in the military, or is incarcerated. A cartoon sent by e-mail can brighten a child's day and keep you connected even if you are far away.
- Take your children to the library, bookstore, or video store to borrow or buy funny DVDs, CDs, or books you can share. Classic comic strips such as *Calvin and Hobbes* are popular with both children and adults.
- Tell your children about funny experiences you, your siblings, or your family had while you were growing up. Give them examples of times when you laughed the hardest, fun games you played, or traditions you shared with your father or grandfather.
- Encourage your children to use their imaginations in making up funny stories that you all can laugh at and enjoy. Some of the most fantastic moments in your lives are created by your children…if you just let them.

If laughter is important to you, it will become a natural part of your child's life, too. Laughter can bring comfort in times of trouble, draw your family closer together, make you more approachable in your children's eyes, and shape memories that last a lifetime.

For Further Discussion

- Name some books, movies, TV shows, or video games that you can use to bring laughter into your home.
- Describe some ways that you can make holiday celebrations fun and memorable for yourself and your family.
- List some good sources for jokes, cartoons, and funny messages or photos that you can surprise your family with and bring smiles to their faces.
- Brainstorm ideas for games, puzzles, pictures, and stories that you can work on with your children through letters, phone calls, text messaging, or e-mail.
- Talk to and work with other dads to develop a list of appropriate jokes, funny stories, videos, TV shows, and other resources. Bring items to share and describe how you used them to add fun to your family's everyday life. Add new items to the list each week.

Check your local public library for these recommended movies on video or DVD

Over the Hedge	Finding Nemo	Shrek, Shrek 2, Shrek the Third
The Princess Bride	Chicken Little	Monsters, Inc.
Surf's Up	Madagascar	The Pacifier
Shark Tale	The Goonies	Cheaper by the Dozen
Freaky Friday	Herbie Fully Loaded	The Santa Clause
The Wild	Spy Kids	Cars
The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie	Muppet Treasure Island	The Incredibles

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