

Aging and the Humor Advantage

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"Humor is the great thing, the saving thing, after all. The minute it crops up, all our hardnesses yield, all our irritations and resentments flit away, and a sunny spirit takes their place." Mark Twain

1. **Keep your face out of "park!" Put your life in "drive" to invite others to join your joy.** Remember, laughter is contagious and so is cynicism. Which would you prefer to give to others? You know the answer—people love to be with people who bring them joy. Don't let aging mean terminal seriousness. Be ready to carry the humor burden when others are having trouble finding their own.

"The best way to cheer yourself is to try to cheer somebody else up." Mark Twain

2. Make room for laughter every day. **Take the work of aging seriously, but take yourself and problems lightly.** Trade the "Eye of the Tiger" for the "Eye of the Loon!" Look for reasons to laugh where you can find it. Be ready to say, "That's Funny!" and "This is going to be a great story!"

"Nothing is better than the unintended humor of reality." Steve Allen

3. Catch yourself being funny. At the end of each day, "What funny incidents happened that made the day special?" **Write down your experiences in your calendar or journal.** Write down unique stories and anecdotes from your family life that you don't want to forget. Watch comedies. Put funny cartoons and articles on your refrigerator door or bulletin board. Once you start collecting or "lifting" humor you like, you'll find that humorous thoughts and spontaneous witty statements will "pop" into your mind and conversations at the most unusual times.

"A giggle a day keeps the gloomies away!" Barbara Johnson

"If you read something often enough, no one can take it away from you." Vera Paulson

4. Make humor a bridge builder to smooth out even the toughest days in your valued relationships. Share laughter wherever you can. **Using your sense of humor is one of the best deposits you can put into your relationship deposit account.**

"Laughter is the shortest distance between two people." Victor Borge

5. Avoid humor that creates laughter at the expense of others. Develop your own humor code and then keep it. **Leave sarcasm and jokes that make fun of others out of your personal comedy repertoire.** You don't need them to be funny, and you may hurt someone without meaning to.

"Some people can make others laugh at others, some with others. Does your humor isolate or bring together?" Norman Cousins

6. **Learn to laugh at your errors and the world will laugh with you--not at you! The safest target for your humor will always be yourself,** so take advantage of it. A good sense of humor makes it easier to admit your mistakes; laughing at your own errors will help you get out of the rearview mirror and bounce back. Most like to be with people who are comfortable with who they are--warts, receding hairlines, and all. Kill your own version of the myth of perfection that leaves you living up to expectations no one can match.

"A laugh at your own expense costs you nothing." Mary H. Waldrip

"It often happens that I wake at night and begin to think about a serious problem and decide I must tell the Pope about it. Then I wake up completely and remember that I am the Pope." Pope John XXIII

7. Laughter also remains one of the best natural tranquilizers that is available whenever you need it. **When things are going crazy, take a trip on the funny side.** Use the gift of humorous perspective: "Is this candid camera?" "This life is a test. It is only a test. If it had been a real life, I would have been given instructions on where to go and what to do." Why cry when you can laugh? After all, "Some days you're the bug; some days the windshield!"

"Sometimes you just need to look reality in the eye, and deny it." Garrison Keillor

"When in trouble ask: Guess What? So What? Now What?" Gil Eagles

8. **Develop humor habits.** Don't send mere notes to family members, send joke mail and it will be read. Try sharing humorous incidents instead of negative gossip when you talk to others. Take time to initiate and talk humor over meals. Keep asking the question, "What funny incidents happened to you today?" Take turns answering. Always be ready to say, "Now, that's funny!"

"The next best thing to solving a problem is finding some humor in it." Frank A. Clark

9. **Don't suffer the sin of being dull in the entertainment age.** Effective humor unlocks a listener's receptivity; it's a "grabber" that pulls people out of the noise of life to work at listening. True communication provides more than a stream of words; it evokes images that help others understand and retain information. Share good stories that shares valuable information, gets a smile, and is remembered.

"I have found in the course of a large experience that common people...are more easily informed through the medium of a broad and humorous illustration than in any other way." Abraham Lincoln

10. **Allow yourself to be silly.** Forget all that serious training you had as a child. Embrace a new word, "Neoteny," which means "maturing but retaining childlike qualities." Good humorists let their "child" show for fun and profit. When using humor, give yourself permission to be a "ham" and show your enjoyment and emotions. Risk being young at heart and let your face and animation show that.

"Brighten the corner where you are. You don't have to change the world, but you can brighten the corner where you are through your attitude and sense of humor." Brian Lee

11. **Stretch your humor muscles daily.** Think setups by engaging the family in mental teasers--"What if...?" "Do you ever wonder...?" "How would Candid Camera visit us today?" "What crazy bumper sticker would I like to see on my bumper?" Such questions open the mind to crazy, humorous options. Look for opportunities to take things literally and watch the humor happen. Do exactly what you are told and act it out in front of others. **If you want to use humor, you have to practice, practice, practice.** Practice won't make you perfect, just better. That's enough to keep life fun!

"We have no more right to consume happiness without producing it than to consume wealth without producing it." George Bernard Shaw

12. **Promise never to let it be a crime to remember the fun in your life, and never be so busy that you can't take a journey down your memory lane of humorous experiences. Always keep an air of playfulness, taking time to laugh and smile in the home.** At any age, let there be laughter, and let it start with you.

"...Parsons, even in his prosperity, always fretting; Potts, in the midst of his poverty, ever laughing. It seems, then, that happiness in this life rather depends on internals than externals...." Benjamin Franklin

"Joy is not in things, it is in us." Ben Franklin

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