



# Laughter is the Best Medicine: Healing Through Humor



New York State Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services

NYAPRS is a change agent dedicated to improving services, public policies and social conditions for people with mental health, substance use and trauma-related challenges, by promoting health, wellness and recovery, with full community inclusion, so that all may achieve maximum potential in communities of choice.

**Advocate, Educate, Demonstrate & Innovate**

## **New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services**



[www.nyaprs.org](http://www.nyaprs.org)



# STRIVE FOR FIVE CHALLENGE

## New Yorkers Looking out for New Yorkers



Identify 5 people to check-in with every day for the next 30 days

Prioritize people who live alone, are in recovery and/or are feeling anxious

Think about starting a team in your agency, company, club or circle of friends

If you are going to take the challenge – email us with your start date at  
[STRIVEFORFIVECHALLENGE@GMAIL.COM](mailto:STRIVEFORFIVECHALLENGE@GMAIL.COM)

Use Social Media to promote more people committing to connect with 5 people a day  
#NYSTRIVE5

## Your Presenter for today

Larry Hochwald, CPRP -  
NYAPRS Training &  
Technical Assistance  
Facilitator New York  
City & Long Island



# Larry Hochwald

- CPRP (Certified Psychiatric Rehabilitation practitioner)
- Over 20 years working in behavioral health : Inpatient, Residential, Employment and over 17 years Training.
- 2007-Present Co-Chair then Boardmember of the Staten Island Mental Health Council
- 2015: Honored by NAMI, Staten Island region
- Author and Co-authored 3 articles in Behavioral Health News (employment, stigma, integrating medical and mental health care) 2008, 2009 & 2012
- Presented at undergraduate and graduate programs on Stigma and presented and/or sat on panels at annual conferences also on stigma. 2008-2011
- Over 22 years in management in for-profit and non-profit

## Today's Humor Goals

- Discuss why McDonald's stopped counting after 100 billion were served?
- Examine data that suggests I don't know what I'm talking about.
- Review ways in which we can all lower our cable bills?

## Today's Humorless Goals

- Discuss what humor is and its benefits
- Look at integrating humor in a helping relationship. Identifying when and when not to.
- Review humor strategies and exercises

## Definition of Humor

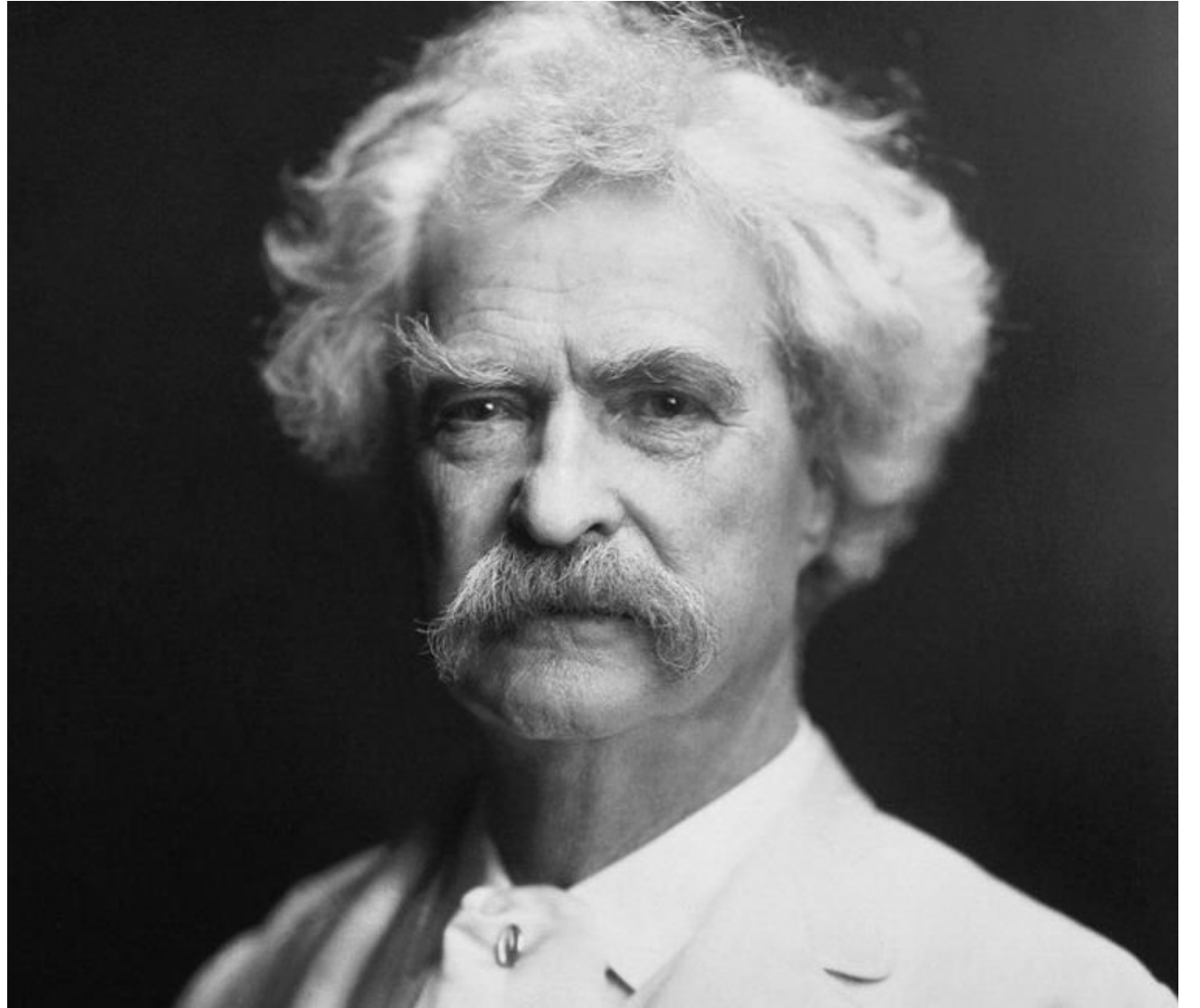
- **a** : that quality which appeals to a sense of the ludicrous or absurdly incongruous : a funny or amusing quality
- **b** : the mental faculty of discovering, expressing, or appreciating the ludicrous or absurdly incongruous :
- **c** : something that is or is designed to be comical or amusing





When you laugh, your  
mind, body, and spirit  
change”

Mark Twain





## Benefits of humor on our mental health

- Reduces stress, depression, anxiety and fear.
- Increases energy and can help us perform activities that we might otherwise avoid.
- Laughter, like a smile, is the shortest distance between two people. It makes people feel closer to each other.
- A healthy sense of humor is related to being able to laugh at oneself and a way of accepting oneself.
- When people laugh together, they feel bonded and can better go through hardship together
- Elevates mood.



## Benefits in the therapeutic relationship

- Enhances therapeutic alliance and increases trust between therapists and clients
- Humor can help clients' thought processes by helping them to get unstuck.
- Helps clients cope with difficult situations, such as death and illness.
- Helps clients accept themselves.
- Laughter shifts perspective, allowing clients to see situations in a more realistic, less threatening light



Potential ways  
in which  
humor can  
contribute in  
recovery

- In DBT (Dialectical Behavioral Therapy) Marsha Linehan has found the use of humor and irreverence can help by distracting and breaking out of a train of thought, because irreverence is unexpected. For example:

Client: "I'm going to kill myself."

Therapist: "I thought we agreed that you were not going to quit therapy."

- In *The Use of Humor in Serious Mental Illness: A Review*, Marc Gelkopf noted that previous studies suggested that the use of humor may reduce psychiatric symptomatology, anxiety, depression, verbal hostility and aggression, anger, and improve social support and social competence.
- Linehan MM. *Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder*. New York, NY: Guilford Press; 1993. [Google Scholar]
- Hindawi Publishing Corporation *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine* Volume 2011, Article ID 342837, 8 pages doi:10.1093/ecam/nep106



## Integrating Humor into practice

# The Example of “Adele”

- Modeling and playfully engaging
- Providing a correct emotional experience
- Awareness of the person’s presentation
- Increased connection to your own innate playfulness

[https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1063&context=edissertations\\_sp2](https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1063&context=edissertations_sp2) A TWO-PAPER EXAMINATION ON THE INTEGRATION OF HUMOR INTO CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK -Stephanie Nathanson

Humor, (as well as pets), can affect your brain chemistry.





But he was  
wrong---cats  
work just as  
well (if not  
better!)

- Laughter may also confer medical health benefits. For the past forty years, studies have shown that good, hearty laughter can relieve tension and stress; boost the immune system, by reducing stress hormones and increasing activity among immune cells and antibodies; and help reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke, by improving blood flow and blood vessel function. Laughter and humor can be a tonic for the brain, as well. Triggering the brain's emotional and reward centers spurs the release of dopamine, helping the brain to process emotional responses and enhancing our experience of pleasure; of serotonin, to buoy our mood; and of endorphins, to regulate our pain and stress and to induce euphoria.

the Harvard Mahoney neuroscience institute letter Spring 2010 Vol. 16, No. 2



## Additional Health Benefits of Humor

- Increases heart and respiratory rates. After these initial changes, a person moves into a state of relaxation.
- Lowers levels of the stress hormone, cortisol.
- Laughing more means lower heart attack risk.
- A study found that laughter therapy effectively delays cardiovascular complications of type 2 diabetes.
- Watching a funny movie decreased bronchial responsiveness in people with asthma.
- Watching a humorous movie led to improvements in cognitive function, including learning ability, delayed recall, and visual recognition in study that included 30 older adults.





How to  
encourage  
humor in  
ourselves and  
those we work  
with.

- Learn what makes you and others laugh
- Understand your audience
- Know the rules and boundaries
- Look for the joy in life
- Adapt other people's material
- Look to place people at ease
- Write down the “funny” moments at work
- Laugh at yourself
- Place laughter quotes on a bulletin board
- Start a joke jar
- Try laughter meditation
- Smile



## Tools to Use: How one can expand their sense of Humor

- Observe young people to learn how to find delight and amusement in the most ordinary of things.
- Increase your exposure to comedies, comic sitcoms, joke books, etc.
- Talk with funny friends
- Take a 5/10 minute humor break each day. Read, write, and/or listen to something funny
- If you hear a joke you really like, write it down or tell it to someone else to help you remember it.



## Tools to Use: How one can Expand their Sense of Humor

- Remind yourself to have fun.
- Spend time with those who help you see the bright side. Whenever possible, avoid negative people.
- Avoid conversations, news, entertainment, etc., that frightens, upsets you or makes you feel sad, whenever possible.
- Be mindful of just “lightening up.”



To be or not to  
be---*funny!*

- Use humor to lift other's up, not bring them down
- Sarcasm is not a license to belittle someone
- Bad humor is not an acceptable excuse for bad behavior (Racist, Sexist, ageist and other discriminatory actions)
- Nor is inappropriate humor acceptable and must be gauged for the person/audience/situation i.e. **Why Couldn't they play cards on Noah's Ark? Rodney Dangerfield's wife** and many others that you are thinking about right now!



## Strategies and Exercises

- **Three funny things:** At the end of each day, write down the 3 funniest things you experienced that day. Describe the feelings during each experience.
- **Count funny things:** As each day progresses, keep track of all the funny things that happen. Briefly jot down each one so that you can get a total at the end of each day.
- **Applying humor:** Notice humorous things that happen during a typical day and add new humorous activities. You might include watching a comedy movie or sitcom, talking with your funniest friend on the phone, looking up funny things on the Internet, or reading comics or jokes.



## Strategies and Exercises

- **Collecting funny things:** Recall one of the funniest things you experienced in the past (recent past or distant past) and write the memory down in as much detail as you can.
- **Resolving stress with humor:** Think about a stressful experience from your day. Write about how it was - or could have been - resolved in a funny and humorous way.

Wellenzohn, S., Proyer, R. T., & Ruch, W. (2016). Humor-based online positive psychology interventions: A randomized placebo-controlled long-term trial. *Journal of Positive Psychology*.

So, before you  
go back to  
work...

# THE 11 STAGES OF YOUR WORK DAY 🧳😴



1. WHEN THE ALARM  
GOES OFF



Laughter is the most inexpensive and most effective wonder drug. Laughter is a universal medicine.

**Bertrand Russell**

A good laugh heals a lot of hurts.

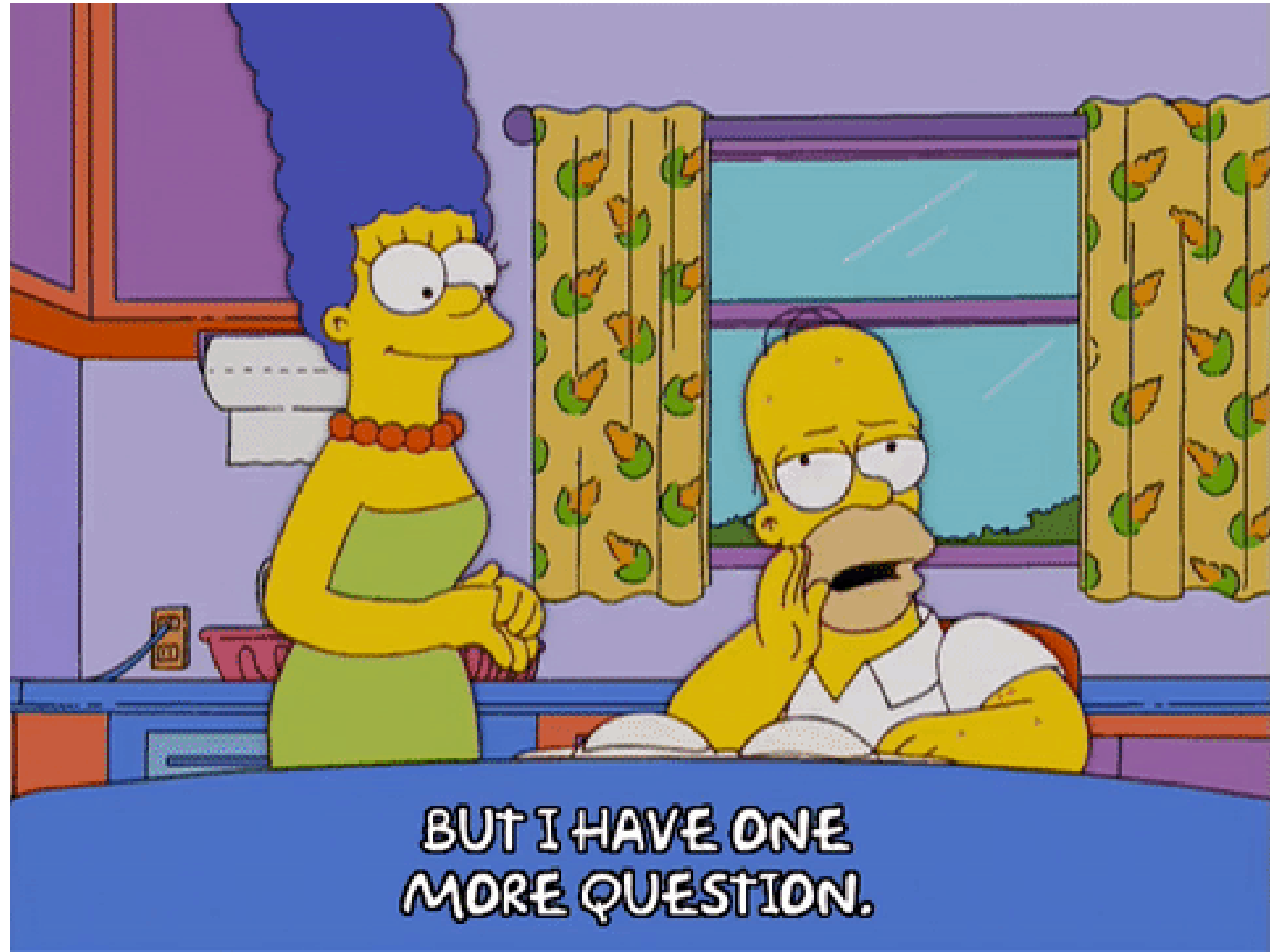
**Madeleine L'Engle**

I have not seen anyone dying of laughter, but I know millions who are dying because they are not laughing.

**Dr. Madan Kataria**



Any  
thoughts,  
comments,  
anecdotes  
and of  
course...



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