

THE FAMILY THAT LAUGHS TOGETHER...

It's amazing to watch a young child laugh. Children's laughter is so uninhibited by stress, fear or self-consciousness. Certainly one of the most endearing features of a young child is the full-faced expression of an all-out laugh. They seem born knowing how to have a good time. As part of the progress toward maturity, however, responsible adults often forget how to enjoy this incredibly stress-relieving activity.

Think back to your early dating relationship with your spouse. Chances are that a good measure of what attracted you to one another in those early days was a good sense of humor. You had fun together. One of you was probably attracted to the other person who could make you laugh. The other was attracted to a person who would laugh with them. It was probably one of the keys to your attraction!

Over time, the laughter tends to get lost in the blend of responsibilities that come with work, children, and life in general. Recapturing that sense of humor can relieve tensions in your home by enabling you to laugh at misunderstandings, be less defensive, and reduce stress. It helps keep things in their proper perspective. Without humor, our priorities can get out of sink by placing a serious amount of energy on something intended to be fun. (Think of preparing for the family vacation, a birthday party or even youth sports!)

How do you build laughter into your family? Ironically, it will start with planning. Any change requires an intentional effort to take hold. You may have to eliminate some of the activities in the family schedule that eat up time and create stress. Once you have carved out some time just to be together as a family, you can use games to begin generating an atmosphere of frivolity. This can be any sort of game, as long as it involves interaction among family members.

Remember, the goal is to laugh and have fun, so it doesn't matter who wins, or whether all the rules are followed to the letter. Even a family fun time can become a source of stress if not approached with light-heartedness. So keep in mind that you are creating laughter and family memories. All fun doesn't have to be planned, but you can use these family activities as a springboard to create the humorous atmosphere in which other spontaneous moments of laughter will occur.

Almost immediately, you will find that these moments enhance your relationships, improve your communication and enable you to make emotional deposits into one another's lives, which you may need to draw on in more serious circumstances. Most of all, you generate an atmosphere where love is communicated among family members spontaneously and regularly. This will be the legacy you leave for your children, your spouse and even yourself, on which you will look back someday...and laugh!

Larry Deavers is Executive Director of Family Counseling Service.

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