

# Maintaining Sense of Humor to Build Resilience

## Objective

To maintain a sense of humor to effectively cope with stress and build resilience.

## You Should Know

Using coping techniques, eliminating stressors from your life, and surrounding yourself with social support are all great ways to build resilience, deal with stress, and improve your physical and emotional health. But sometimes you probably feel stressed despite your best efforts!

Developing and maintaining a sense of humor can be an effective way to reduce stress and strengthen resiliency. According to the journal *Therapeutic Humor*, a sense of humor strengthens both your physical and psychological immune systems. When you laugh, your body experiences an increase in immunoglobulin A, which strengthens your body's immunity – promoting healing, lowering blood pressure, and increasing pain tolerance. Aside from the health benefits of laughter, having a sense of humor provides a way to connect with other people, perceive things in a different way, normalize your experiences, and keep things from becoming overwhelming or scary. A sense of humor strengthens your resilience, allowing you to better manage the ups and downs of life.

## What to Do

Describe a time you were able to find the humor in a problem or stressful situation. What happened? Was your stress reduced when you were able to find humor in the situation? Describe.

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Suggestions for adding humor into your daily life include:

- 1. Smile** – Studies indicate smiling releases endorphins, which makes you feel better and actually leads to feeling happy. If you put a smile on your face, laughter comes more easily and stress melts more readily.
- 2. See your situation as an observer** – If you are distressed and dealing with challenging experiences, it can seem overwhelming or scary. If you step back and view your experience as an observer, it is sometimes easier to recognize the humor in the situation. Seeing your situation through a new lens is known as reframing, and it works. You might imagine yourself as a character in a sitcom to find humor in a situation.

**3. Look to the Extreme** – If a situation is extremely stressful, recognize the potential humor in just how frustrating and annoying it is! Imagine the most ridiculous outcome until you are amused. For example, if you are on the phone with a debt collector and you are placed on a lengthy hold, imagine that hours pass, then days. Visualize yourself eating meals, getting dressed, and conducting your life – all while you are waiting on hold!

**4. Have funny buddies** – Think of friends with whom you can laugh, and spend time with them. Share your frustrations with each other and find humor in stressful situations. If you are in the middle of an upsetting situation, imagine the retelling and laughing with a friend.

**5. Play a game** – Make everyday annoyances amusing by finding humor in unavoidable or repetitive stressors. This works well for predictable, annoying situations you can't control.

**6. Watch funny movies, TV shows, or standup comedy routines** – Watching a show or movie that takes situations that many people find stressful makes you recognize some universally-stressful situations are actually funny.

**7. Watch a brief online video** – If you have very little time to shift your mood, watch a short video on YouTube, [www.hahaha.com](http://www.hahaha.com), or [www.funnyordie.com](http://www.funnyordie.com). There are also humorous cartoon websites like The Onion or The Oatmeal.

**8. Read funny books** – Reading humorous essays or books that include amusing interpretations of life can help you find your own style of managing and coping with stress.

**9. Join “funny” clubs** – Take part in “laughter yoga,” for example.

Your own ideas:

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Next, refer back to the list and select several activities that you will do for the next two weeks. Complete the chart on the next page. Plan one activity/day to add humor to your life. Rate your stress level from 1 to 10, where 1 = completely calm and stress-free, to 10 = extreme distress. Track your stress level before and after engaging in the humorous activity. Include notes, if relevant.



Describe the last time you had a good laugh. What were you doing at the time? How did it feel?

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After practicing a daily humor-inducing activity, did you notice any differences in your distress and ability to manage stress? Have you “lightened up” and increased your ability to laugh and find humor in normally stressful situations? Describe.

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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