# The role of humour in managing stress and mental health



In today’s fast-paced world, many individuals find solace in small rituals to navigate the rigours of life, including managing stress and burnout. Humour, often found in memes that resonate with shared experiences, has emerged as a surprising source of relief for those grappling with mental health challenges. A recent article from AOL.com highlights the role of humour in alleviating emotional distress and fostering connections among individuals.

Humour, particularly in the form of relatable memes, can serve as an unexpected tool in tackling the ups and downs of daily life. Psychotherapist and content creator Lauren Baird remarked to Bored Panda that “humour is a powerful tool for managing difficult emotions.” She explained that laughter triggers the release of neurochemicals such as endorphins, dopamine, and serotonin – the body’s “feel-good hormones,” which can lead to immediate physiological and psychological relief.

Beyond individual comfort, humour fosters social connections. Sarah Lee, another psychotherapist, emphasised that the positive effects of laughter extend beyond mood enhancement, as it can strengthen the bonds between individuals. According to Lee, humour assists in addressing both the problem at hand and the emotions associated with it, providing comfort during unpredictable or uncontrollable situations.

In high-pressure environments such as healthcare and emergency services, humour serves to create a more relaxed atmosphere, aiding in what Baird described as “co-regulation.” This phenomenon occurs when one individual’s calmness positively influences another’s emotional state. Baird elaborated that humour activates the ventral vagal pathway, leading to feelings of safety and connection.

However, the article also underscores the complexity of humour as a coping mechanism. Psychotherapist Emily Cook noted that while humour may momentarily deflect serious conversations, it can also become a shield that prevents deeper emotional engagement. Lee added that humour can turn maladaptive if it disguises feelings rather than addressing them, potentially resulting in emotional avoidance.

Baird further distinguishes between adaptive and maladaptive humour. Adaptive humour enhances one’s resilience and promotes camaraderie, while maladaptive humour tends to be self-defeating or may hurt others. Recognising the type of humour one employs is essential in determining whether it serves as a genuine coping strategy or as a detrimental distraction.

The article highlights the importance of timing in humour use, indicating that while laughter may have its place, there are instances when processing feelings in a safe environment is critical. Both Baird and Cook advocate for open discussions about emotions, whether with a therapist or trusted individual. In these conversations, naming feelings can activate brain processes that regulate emotional responses, making it easier to manage distress.

Moreover, Baird makes a compelling case for developing interoceptive awareness, which involves tuning into bodily sensations linked with emotions. Recognising and naming one’s feelings can significantly diminish their intensity, facilitating healthier emotional processing. Once emotions are acknowledged, Baird encourages individuals to allow themselves to feel and process these emotions smoothly, thereby averting potential outbursts from accumulated stress.

Lastly, therapy can provide valuable guidance for personal development, offering strategies such as establishing boundaries and fostering emotional self-care. While humour may create connections among individuals facing similar challenges, its impact on emotional resolution is often limited without deeper engagement.

As people continue to share and enjoy memes that elicit laughter, the underlying message remains: while humour can play a role in managing life’s stresses, it is crucial to balance laughter with conscious emotional processing to promote genuine well-being.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)