

Dads, Do You Laugh With Your Kids?

I have always loved to laugh with my kids. Who doesn't, right?

A dad named Richard tells about one night when he was reading books with his 4-year-old son. Little Matt wanted one more book, but Richard said it was time for bed.

Now, Richard and his wife typically offer their children choices to help shape their behavior; the two choices, both of which are agreeable to Richard and his wife, establish appropriate boundaries while giving the children a sense of power in day-to-day matters.

Well, on this night Richard found out that Matt was catching on to his system ... sort of. When Richard said again, "Sorry, son, that's enough for tonight," Matt came back with, "OK, Dad. Would you rather read me another book or have me poke your eye?"

Fatherhood brings lots of those priceless moments of humor and joy to our lives—among many other benefits. But too often the serious and sober realities of raising responsible children overwhelm our spontaneous, witty and playful sides.

But we need to remember that humor and laughter promote health—physically, developmentally and relationally. Physically, laughter relaxes muscles, releases stress hormones, reduces pain and may even enhance our immune systems—according to Paul McGhee, Ph.D., who has done extensive research on humor.

As children grow, if they learn to appreciate humor, they will develop higher creative skills because humor and creativity both draw on divergent thinking—they bring new and unique insights to problems and situations. That capacity also helps

children deal well with the unexpected, which is beneficial for coping in day-to-day situations.

Surely you've surely seen the power of laughter in relating to your children. In tense situations, a good dose of laughter can open doors and restore a sense of hope. When you're having fun with your child, you both let your guard down and you're likely to have better communication and just enjoy each other's company. Laughter makes you more approachable—especially if you can laugh at your own shortcomings.

What are some ways to do this? From what I've seen, play and humor come natural for most dads. I've provided some suggestions in the Action Points below, but I'm really hoping you'll provide me (and other dads) with a bunch more ideas by leaving a comment either below or on our Facebook page.

Please let us know: How do you and your kids have fun and laugh together most often?

Action Points for Dads on the Journey

- Humor is a great strategy with children of any age, if you know how to get to their funny bone. Figure out how to have fun on your children's level by immersing yourself in their world. Hang out together, read their books, play their games, listen to their stories, etc.
- Play make-believe with your young child. Let yourself go! Shake hands with "imaginary friends"; use your silly voice; make the chair talk and the flowers sing.
- When something funny happens, capture it on video, audio, in a photograph or in a journal. Relive that memory when everyone is frustrated, depressed or just needs to laugh.
- What common interests do you have with your child when it comes to humor, and what you enjoy? What causes laughter and silliness in your daughter? What brings

that mischievous grin to your son's face? Find out, and then capitalize on it for the benefit of your relationship.

- Tell each child about the joy you felt at his or her birth. Recall other specific times since then when they have brought you joy.

Carey Casey is the CEO of the National Center for Fathering, a nonprofit organization dedicated to changing the culture of fathering in America by enlisting 6.5 million fathers to make the Championship Fathering Commitment. NCF believes that every child needs a dad they can count on, and uses its resources to inspire and equip men to be the involved fathers, grandfathers and father figures their children need. Subscribe to his weekly email tip by clicking here: "Yes! I want tips on how to be a great dad who lives out loving, coaching and modeling for my children."

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