

# Exploring Humor

What Do We Know About IT?

What IS Your Personal Funny Bone?

How Can Humor Benefit Work?

What Are the Health Benefits?

What Resources Are Available?

# What Do We Know About IT?

## Enjoy More Comedy, Mirth, and Laughter!!

You can be a serious professional without being a solemn professional. In fact, to be dead serious about your work leads to *Karaoshi*: Terminal Professionalism! Remember, he who laughs lasts.



### In Business...

In a survey of 737 CEOs, over 98% said they would hire somebody with a sense of humor rather than a candidate without one. "Ben and Jerry's" has a **Joy Committee** providing grants to employees to develop ideas that bring more joy into the workplace.

Ken Blanchard, **The One Minute Manager**, says in *Laughing Matters*:

"Humor and laughter in organizations can increase the amount of feedback you can get, the honesty, and the capacity for people to tell you good things. All the solutions to problems in organizations are within your own people, but the problem is half of them don't want to say anything because they usually get zapped—you kill the messenger. It's through humor that you can open up the lines to communication."



### In Marriage...

Respected researchers John Gottman and Sybil Careere are able to predict the success of a marriage with 88% to 94% accuracy based on the presence of romance, humor, and affection in the partners' communication style. This may be why "his sense of humor" is so often given by women to explain their attraction to a particular male. Or it could be the other factor learned from humor research: the dominant male in a pack or tribe is the one who will have the confidence and security to tease and play.

Some 69% of couples have "perpetual problems," like different attitudes toward finances, which can kill a marriage unless the communication style that frames the discussion reflects those three factors. While the study identified criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling as destroyers of marriages, an effective funny bone can ameliorate their effect.

## In Life...

In social situations, humor is a powerful tool to help people get to know one another, and to bond teams, overcome cultural differences, and bring newcomers into the fold. In business, humor improves performance, encourages positive thinking, energizes meetings, promotes creativity, and gets more work done. Humor is the bonding agent that creates trust and strengthens relationships.

Humor is a proven antidote to stress, a key to good communications, and contributes to healthy relationships. Developing your humor skills is sure to make you healthier and happier. And humor is a skill that can be developed.



## Impediments to Humor

If you are feeling humor-challenged and frightened by the suggestion that you should develop this interpersonal skill, perhaps you should consider whether you are overloaded by stress or work. Or is this a sign you need emotional therapy due to depression?

And don't worry about it if you are not a stand-up comic—*The Humor Project* has been operating since 1977, and while 80% of its seminar participants think they have good senses of humor, 98% of them say they can't tell a joke to save their life.

### **Humor is worth learning because it can:**

- Focus on the universal human experience
- Encourage a positive atmosphere
- Build rapport and trust
- Support and build confidence

# What Do We Know About Humor?

## Exploring Humor

1. What is humor? Can you define or describe it? What is a sense of humor?
2. What do we know about humor? Facts, beliefs, etc.
3. How does humor work? Why can't you tickle yourself?
4. Are there categories of humor? Which? Are there styles of humor?

**Link these words appropriately by connecting lines:**

**comedy**

**physical**

**mirth**

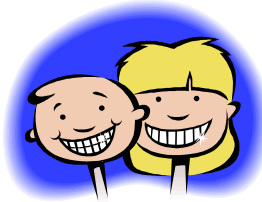
**intellectual**

**laughter**

**emotional**

# Humor Is Comedy, Fun, Mirth, and Laughter.

**Humor** is more than a laughing matter because it uncovers shared emotions and the feeling of being at one with others.



*Wikipedia* explains humor as the ability or quality of people, objects or situations to evoke feelings of amusement in other people. The term encompasses any form of entertainment or human communication which evokes such feelings, or which makes people laugh or feel happy.

**A sense of humor** is culturally determined. Sense of humor is or can be learned.

*Wikipedia* describes **a sense of humor** as the ability to *experience* humor, a quality which all people share, although the extent to which an individual will personally find something humorous depends on a host of absolute and relative variables, including, but not limited to geographical location, culture, maturity, level of education and context. For example, young children (of any background) particularly favor slapstick, while satire tends to appeal to more mature audiences.



**Laughter** is universal and contagious.

It is the world's common language and a miracle drug. People are hard-wired to laugh—picture the four-month old infant laughing at peek-a-boo.

Laughter is the biological reaction of humans to moments or occasions of humor: an outward expression of amusement. The activity of laughing is the physical manifestation of joy or mirth or scorn.

**Comedy** is humor that engages your mind. What you perceive amuses you. It may be slapstick or word games, but some part of your brain is at work.



**Wit** is a form of intellectual humor, based on manipulation of concepts; a wit is someone who excels in witty remarks, typically in conversation and spontaneously, since wit carries the connotation of speed of thought. It requires astuteness of perception or judgment and the ability to relate seemingly disparate things so as to illuminate or amuse.

**Mirth is genuine emotion.** It is the manifestation of gladness and gaiety, especially when expressed by laughter. It arises from great merriment.



# Humor in Presentations and Training



"Can't you guys just pretend to be interested in my presentation?"

Humor helps participants:

- Remember the main points
- See the big picture
- Retain information longer
- Interact with members of the audience
- Get a sensitive idea without offence
- Feel free to express themselves

The good news is that to use humor in presentations and training, you don't need to be a stand-up comedian. What you need to do is make a connection with the audience. Do it by promoting an atmosphere of interaction, amusement, and openness.

Sprinkle some levity in your title, opening story, and closing or surprise the audience with unusual connections.

Many speakers and trainers resist using humor because they see themselves as *humor-challenged*. Yet these same people create and share humor with family, friends and colleagues regularly.

People are more inclined to use humor in an atmosphere of trust and familiarity when there is an existing relationship between the people involved. But it works both ways. Humor and laughter are like *social glue* to help create trust, familiarity and relationships.

## Presenters NEVER...

1. Use canned jokes that have no connection to your purpose.
2. Read your jokes and stories instead of telling them.
3. Laugh at your own jokes; better yet start laughing before you tell them.
4. Announce that you are going to tell a joke; apologize if it bombs.
5. Berate the audience for not laughing: "That was supposed to be funny."
6. Tell stories that make fun of others or make them look ridiculous.
7. Be sarcastic and act superior.
8. Use humor that the audience may not understand because of cultural, professional, gender or age differences.
9. Play practical jokes designed to embarrass people.
10. Tell off-color stories.

## Discuss :

Humorless is powerless.

Humor is agreement.

Humor is connection.

Humor is team building.

Humor is genuine.



# What Is Your Personal Funny Bone?

Everyone is more effective and successful when they have a clear understanding of themselves and their own motivations. Part of self-knowledge is to discover your inner clown and find your own voice. Call this your *humor signature*.

Which is your preferred humor?

- Zany props
- Slapstick
- Skits or parodies
- Practical jokes
- Witty or wry observations; irony, sarcasm, satire
- Wordplay: puns, metaphors or analogies
- Fable, fairy tale or other literary narrative
- Personal stories or anecdotes
- Irony (when a statement has both a superficial and a concealed meaning which are contradictory)
- Jokes
- Comic sounds or funny words
- Riddles
- Parody
- Ridicule (Darwin Awards), self-ridicule (Rodney Dangerfield)
- Absurdity, surrealism (Steven Wright)
- Deadpan
- Practical jokes
- Visual humor

- Funny characters
- Unintentional humor
- Character-driven (without punchlines)
- Telling the truth; observational humor

# Evaluate Your Sense of Humor

|   | <b>1- Never</b> | <b>2- Almost Never</b> | <b>3- Seldom</b> | <b>4- Sometimes</b> | <b>5- Often</b> | <b>6- Almost Always</b> | <b>7- Always</b> |
|---|-----------------|------------------------|------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| I have a lot of laughs.                                 |                 |                        |                  |                     |                 |                         |                  |
| I have a lot of fun.                                    |                 |                        |                  |                     |                 |                         |                  |
| I laugh at my own mistakes.                             |                 |                        |                  |                     |                 |                         |                  |
| I think happy, fun and uplifting thoughts.              |                 |                        |                  |                     |                 |                         |                  |
| I am spontaneous.                                       |                 |                        |                  |                     |                 |                         |                  |
| I like to hear and tell jokes.                          |                 |                        |                  |                     |                 |                         |                  |
| I take myself lightly at work.                          |                 |                        |                  |                     |                 |                         |                  |
| I like to watch and read humorous material.             |                 |                        |                  |                     |                 |                         |                  |
| I take responsibility for my own happiness.             |                 |                        |                  |                     |                 |                         |                  |
| I consider other's feelings before I attempt any humor. |                 |                        |                  |                     |                 |                         |                  |
| I surround myself with positive family and friends.     |                 |                        |                  |                     |                 |                         |                  |
| I plan time to play.                                    |                 |                        |                  |                     |                 |                         |                  |
| I avoid giving offence with my humor.                   |                 |                        |                  |                     |                 |                         |                  |
| I like to hear and tell funny life stories.             |                 |                        |                  |                     |                 |                         |                  |
| I use my sense of humor to cope in unpleasant times.    |                 |                        |                  |                     |                 |                         |                  |
| I like to act silly.                                    |                 |                        |                  |                     |                 |                         |                  |

|   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| I plan and take time for vacations.             |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I am happy to give of myself.                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I use my sense of humor to deal with stress.    |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I believe the more I laugh, the healthier I am. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Total your points.                              |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <b>FACES</b> Draw 9 faces — each with a different emotion. |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

# Happy



Feelings

Add words to these lists of positive feelings we get from good humor.

| <b>High</b>  | <b>Medium</b>  | <b>Mild</b>   |
|--|--|---|
| Elated<br>Excited<br>Overjoyed<br>Thrilled<br>Exuberant<br>Ecstatic<br>Fired up<br>Delighted | Cheerful<br>Up<br>Good<br>Relieved<br>Satisfied<br>Contented | Glad<br>Content<br>Satisfied<br>Pleasant<br>Fine<br>Mellow<br>Pleased |

# Safe Harbor: Good Humor Rules

## **Rule #1**

Don't make jokes about sex. It makes people uncomfortable.

## **Rule #2**

Don't make jokes about people's appearance or anything that they cannot change or did not choose. Just don't go there.

## **Rule #3**

Don't make jokes about a whole group of people. Avoid jokes about religion, ethnic background, nationality, sexual orientation and so on.

## **Rule #4**

Don't be gross. Avoid jokes about bodily functions.

## Appropriate Humor

Appropriate humor is inclusive.

It decreases prejudice by focusing on the universal human experience.


It encourages a positive atmosphere.

It builds rapport and trust. It is based on caring.

## Inappropriate Humor

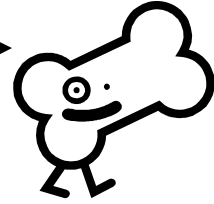
The basic rule is that any humor is inappropriate when it is

- exclusive—separates people,
- puts someone down or ridicules others,
- destroys self-esteem,
- uses stereotypes of groups,
- contributes to a negative atmosphere,
- offends others, or lacks awareness of others' feelings.

| <b>What brings you good humor? Work at getting more!</b> |                          |                                    |   |
|--|--------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Comedy</b><br>Using your mind                         | <b>Mirth</b><br>Emotions | <b>Laughter</b><br>Physical Action | When?  |
|  |                          |                                    | In the past three days?   |
|  |                          |                                    | From now on...  |

# Work On Your Funny Bone

***funny bone*** →



If you need some hints for developing your funny bone:

- Figure out what makes you laugh and do more of it.
- Surround yourself with funny people. Collect toys and props.
- Don't even try to be a stand-up comedian if you are shy or you can't remember punch lines. Or give it a try by joining one of the comedy workshops at a local community college or center.
- The truth is often funnier than fiction. Tell your own true-life stories. Didn't Seinfeld show us the success of that? Collect true stories.
- Freely share your witty or wry observations about daily life. Just remember humor only works when it meets the AT&T Test: Appropriate, Timely & Tasteful.
- Collect other people's personal stories or anecdotes to share in the future. Just don't forget the confidentiality—keep the characters unrecognizable. Customize anecdotes to fit the audience or subject.
- Watch the Comedy Network. Visit comedy clubs.
- Join a Laughter Club.
- Subscribe to an emailed daily joke or purchase a desk-calendar with a daily joke.

What else?



## Find the Comic in the Mundane

The essence of humor lies in presenting something familiar, which has a natural follow-up, then giving it a twist by presenting something different than expected (surprise), or by interpreting the original situation in an uncommon way. For example:

*A man speaks to his doctor after an operation. He says, "Doc, now that the surgery is done, will I be able to play the piano?" The doctor replies, "Of course!" The man says, "Good, because I couldn't before!"*

## Comedy Formula

Required components:

- Some surprise, contradiction, ambiguity or paradox.
- Appealing to feelings or to emotions.
- Similar to reality, but not real.

Methods:

- Metaphor
- Hyperbole
- Reframing
- Timing
- SCAMPER

# Worksheet—Humor Resources

Where or how can you get more exposure to humor?

Places to go:

Things to do:

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

# Humor in the Workplace



According to neuroscientist Dr. Robert Provine, jokes, stories and other recognizable attempts at humor generate less than 20% of all laughter. "Most laughter is not a response to comedy but rather an attempt to set a positive emotional tone and enhance feelings of group belonging."

Humor helps:

- People get acquainted
- Groups bond into teams
- Strangers no longer feel like outsiders
- Improve performance
- Promote creativity
- Transcend cultural differences
- Encourage positive thinking
- Energize meetings
- Get more work done

What else?

## Humor in *Your* Workplace

How can humor help in some common challenges that you face in the workplace?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Think a minute, then write down 3 things that could be done to take advantage of humor in your own workplace.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Why is the application of humor important in the business or industry you are in?

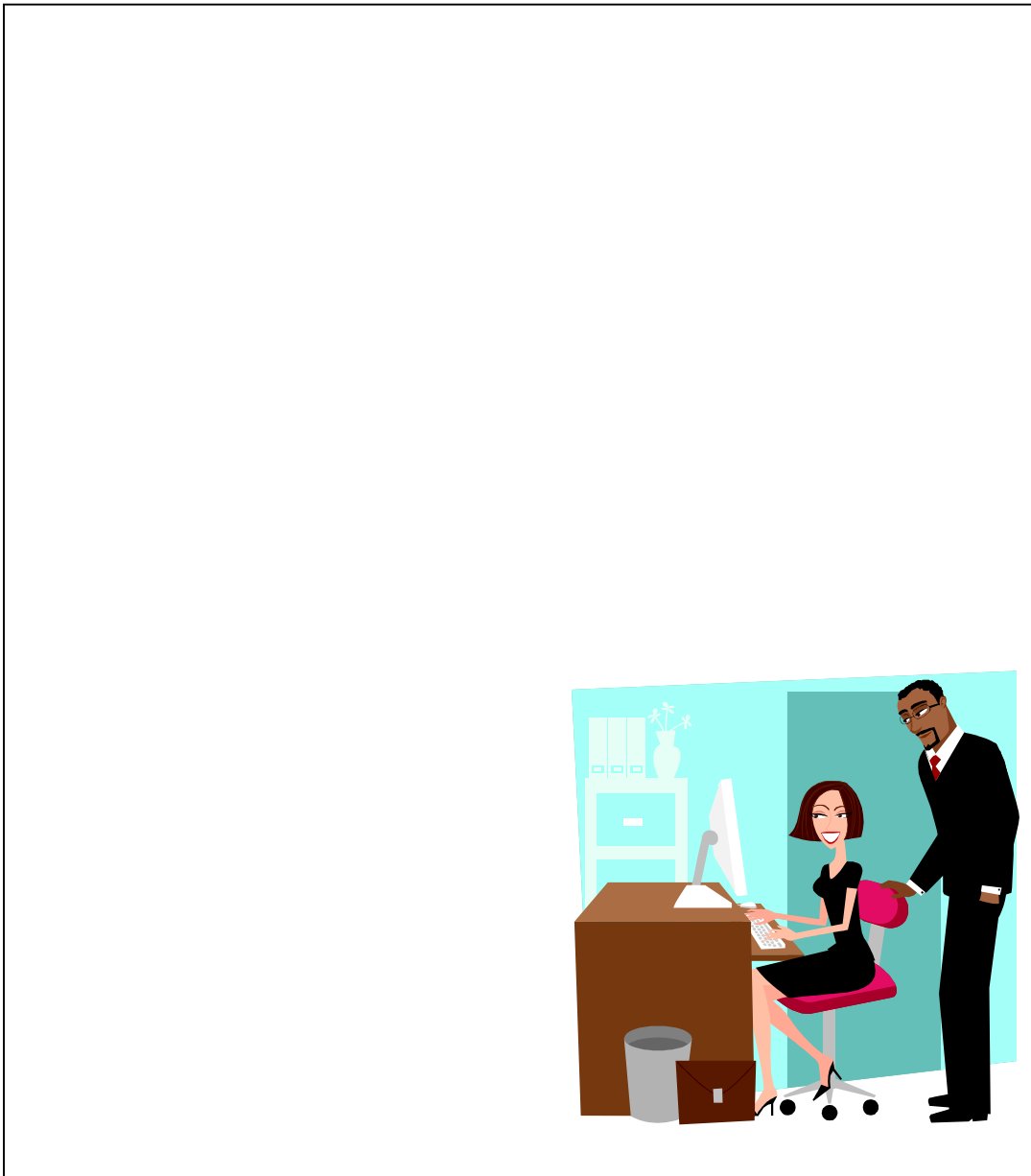
# Applied Humor

How can you get the benefit of humor in your workplace or organization?

What steps can you take Monday morning to lobby for a humor program?

- Put humor into the physical environment.
- Build humor into the corporate culture.
- Use humor as a tool rather than a weapon.

How?



# Ways to experience humor at work:

Theme days

Baby or pet pictures

Clown noses and other props

Stuffed animals

Humor altars and shadow boxes

Anonymous acts of kindness

Funny buttons to wear

A picnic in the cafeteria

Contests: nerf basketball, giant bubble blowing, hallway golf

Paper airplanes

Cartoon bulletin board

Laughersize

Walking like a penguin

Appoint a *Cheerman of the Bored*

# Overcoming Oppositional Forces

What opposition might you encounter at work?

How might you overcome it?

"grow up"

"no pain, no gain"

cultural differences

generational differences

hierarchy

work ethic

fears

reduced productivity

*terminal professionalism*

Other:

# Health Facts on Humor and Laughter



Ever since Norman Cousins wrote *Anatomy of an Illness* in 1979 about self-cure by laughter, medical researchers have recognized that humor and laughter are important factors in:

- Reducing stress and tension
  - Promoting mental and physical health
  - Strengthening the immune system
  - Recovering faster from disease and injury
- When you laugh heartily, your body gets a vigorous physical workout, your heart beats faster, feel-good endorphins are released in your blood stream and your body chemistry changes. When endorphins are released, your mood is instantly elevated.
- Like any other workout, laughter improves your respiration and circulation, oxygenates the blood, suppresses stress-related hormones and releases endorphins in the brain, and it activates the immune system. Evidence has shown that humor can play a role in speeding recovery from injury, reducing allergic response, and promoting mental and physical health.
- A study in the May issue of *Diabetes Care* reports a connection between laughter and blood glucose levels. Laughter produces lower blood sugar levels.
- It's possible that laughter increases the body's pain threshold, but more research is needed to know for sure. Laughter lessens the perception of pain and lowers the blood levels of cortisol (a stress hormone), which may reduce sensitivity to pain.
- People with heart disease are 40 percent less likely to laugh a lot or to use humor as a coping mechanism. We don't know why laughing protects the heart, but we do know that mental stress is associated with the impairment of the endothelium, the protective barrier lining our blood vessels. This can cause a series of inflammatory reactions that lead to fat cholesterol build-up in the coronary arteries, and ultimately to a heart attack.
- Laughter lowers your cortisol while increasing your endorphins (feel-good hormones). High levels of cortisol suppress your immune system and cause your blood pressure to rise. Laughter provides a safety valve that shuts off the flow of stress hormones and the fight-or-flight compounds that swing into action in our bodies when we experience stress, anger or hostility. These stress hormones suppress the immune system, increase the number of blood platelets (which can cause obstructions in arteries) and raise blood pressure.



- ❑ On the other hand, laughter increases your natural killer cells and T-cells, which attack viruses and even some cancer cells. When we're laughing, natural killer cells that destroy tumors and viruses increase, as do Gamma-interferon (a disease-fighting protein), T-cells, which are a major part of the immune response, and B-cells, which make disease-destroying antibodies.
- ❑ Laughter may lead to hiccupping and coughing, which clears the respiratory tract by dislodging mucous plugs. Laughter also increases the concentration of salivary immunoglobulin A, which defends against infectious organisms entering through the respiratory tract. What may surprise you even more is the fact that researchers estimate that laughing 100 times is equal to 10 minutes on the rowing machine or 15 minutes on an exercise bike.
- ❑ Blood pressure is lowered, and there is an increase in vascular blood flow and in oxygenation of the blood, which further assists healing. Laughter also gives your diaphragm and abdominal, respiratory, facial, leg and back muscles a workout. That's why you often feel exhausted after a long bout of laughter—you've just had an aerobic workout!
- ❑ The psychological benefits of humor are amazing: People store negative emotions, such as anger, sadness and fear, rather than expressing them. Laughter provides a way for these emotions to be harmlessly released. Laughter is cathartic. That's why some people who are upset or stressed out go to a funny movie or a comedy club, so they can laugh the negative emotions away (these negative emotions, when held inside, can cause biochemical changes that can affect our bodies).
- ❑ Increasingly, mental health professionals are suggesting "laughter therapy," which teaches people how to laugh—openly—at things that aren't usually funny and to cope in difficult situations by using humor. Doctors and psychiatrists are becoming more aware of the therapeutic benefits of laughter and humor. There is a growing body of humor and laughter scholarship (500 academicians from different disciplines belong to the **International Society for humor Studies**).





# Scoring for "Evaluate Your Sense of Humor"

Add your Score:

**If your score was between 115-140**, you have an excellent humor concept and attitude. Whether you realize it or not, you are a humor teacher and well on your way to really influencing others. This book will aid you a great deal in that process.

**If your score was between 85-114**, your concept and attitude are good and right in the "healthy" North-American average. This book will be an excellent tool for you to bump it up a notch.

**Between 50-84, is fair.** You probably feel you really need this and may even be a little "humor-challenged." You will have a good time with this book. Take the evaluation again when you've finished reading and compare your scores. You'll be impressed.

**If you scored 25-49**, you are officially "humor-challenged." You have brought up some issues and perhaps, you were a little hard on yourself? This book will be quite an experience for you.

**If you answered 24 or less** with honesty and sincerity—yikes! Take it again another day or you might be best to seek further professional advice.

# Humor Groups and Research Resources

**The International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS)** is a scholarly and professional organization dedicated to the advancement of humor research. Many of the Society's members are university and college professors in the Arts and Humanities, Biological and Social Sciences, and Education. The Society also includes professionals in the fields of counselling, management, nursing, journalism, and theatre. All of our members are interested in humor's many facets, including its role in business, entertainment, and health care as well as how humor varies according to culture, age, gender, purpose, and context. <http://www.hnu.edu/ishs/>

## **Humor Research page**

<http://www.uni-duesseldorf.de/WWW/MathNat/Ruch/Humor.html>

## **Canadian Society for Therapeutic Humor**

<http://www.canadahumor.org/>

## **The Association for the Study of Play**

<http://www.csuchico.edu/kine/tasp/>

## **Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor**

<http://aath.org/>

## **RxLaughter**

<http://www.rxlaughter.com/>

## **American Association for Therapeutic Humor**

<http://www.aath.org/>

## **International Society For Humor Studies**

<http://www.uni-duesseldorf.de/WWW/MathNat/Ruch/Humor.html>

## **World Laughter Tour**

<http://www.worldlaughtertour.com/>

## **Fellowship of Merry Christians**

<http://www.joyfulnoiseletter.com/>

## **Patch Adams**

<http://www.patchadams.org/>

## **TouchStar Productions**

<http://www.touchstarpro.com/>

## **ISHS - 1999 Conference Site**

<http://www.hnc.edu/events/Humor99/>

# Humor and Healing Related Links

<http://www.aath.org>

Information about the humor conferences sponsored by The Association for Applied and Therapeutic humor.

<http://www.rslaughter.org>

Nonprofit research, therapeutic entertainment and education project dedicated to medical uses of comedy programs as a prescription for seriously ill pediatric patients and their families.

<http://www.jesthealth.com>

Nurse-humorist, Patty Wooten provides a complete resource for information about the therapeutic value of humor and laughter.

<http://www.sburton.com/inconnav.htm>

A resource that focuses on the human (and humorous) side of cancer.

<http://www.rtpnet.org/~cahaha/>

Carolina Health and humor Association promoting humor in healthcare, business and community.

<http://www.cancerclub.com>

Humorous and helpful products for people with cancer.

[http://les1.man.ac.uk/cric/jason\\_rutter/HumorResearch/search.htm](http://les1.man.ac.uk/cric/jason_rutter/HumorResearch/search.htm)

An interdisciplinary bibliography containing 3,700 humor references.

<http://www.squaresail.com/onHumor1.html>

List of humor resources aimed at speakers, communicators and educators.

<http://www.foolsforhealth.ca/articles.htm>

A resource section from clown-doctors who bring smiles and laughter for better health.