

A photograph of a woman with long dark hair hugging a young girl from behind. They are both smiling and looking upwards. The scene is set outdoors in a field of yellow flowers, likely sunflowers, during the golden hour of sunset. The lighting is warm and soft, creating a nostalgic and joyful atmosphere.

Bubble wrap *and* bubble gum

Where did the Summer go?

In the blink of an eye there is a switch from flip-flops and beach towels to class schedules, textbooks and backpacks. Summer fun can quickly become a distant memory and a bit of panic can occur with the back-to-school rush. Some people experience severe “back-to-school” anxiety that has become hard-wired in their brain. This apprehension often begins as early as elementary school and can become deep-rooted over time. Purposeful interventions can reduce stress and change these established brain patterns.

We know that playful mirth, laughter and humor are not only beneficial for learning, but can be a critical component for dealing with stress. The lightness of summer does not have to disappear as we switch to autumn routines.

Fall into humor with these ten powerful strategies:

1 Flip-flop the Brain: The goal is to flip the anxiety and flop into some fun. With purposeful implementation, humor can become a habit. Laughter interrupts damaging and negative thought-producing patterns in our brain. Playfulness induces amusement and mirth. Humor optimizes learning. There are many fun flip-flop techniques that will enhance learning and facilitate the storage of information in the long-term memory.

2 Shake it Up: It is amazing how a quick surprise or noticing something odd can interject humor into the most challenging day.

Walk backwards outside for 5 minutes or discover another silly activity to revitalize your brain cells. Scan your surroundings for something whimsical or funny. Share gratitude with those who bring you delight. A silly note or fun item in a child’s lunchbox or on a colleague’s desk can make their day. An unexpected greeting card is especially appreciated in this day of texts and email. Givers become receivers of joy when sharing humergy*.

3 Jest Smile: Smiling is contagious. Infect as many people as you can. Smiles can be shared with store clerks and with people on the street, as well as your friends and colleagues. Show your pearly whites often, and your life will brighten too. Repeat silly words or phrases to get others to smile. “My dog can lick anyone.” usually gets a laugh while walking your dog. Compliments work well as a smile companion. Be generous!

4 Humor the Humordoomers*: You may want to soar with the eagles but end up feeling like a buzzard, after an encounter with a humordoomer. Everyone has a bad day once in a while, but for those who are consistently negative, it helps to plan a counter-offensive. Try to squash the negativity with kindness, understanding and humor. Often these insecure folks will laugh at humorous one-liners:

- I resemble that statement.
- What would Scooby Do?
- There is no time like the pleasant.

Try to change the direction of negative conversations with planned

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A focus on humor and fun can relieve back-to-school stress and energize your learning experiences. Never take life too seriously, you won't get out alive.

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redirection. Your best efforts may not work, so avoiding these folks may be a last resort.

5 Chew on It: Bubble gum is a great way to blow off the stress. This minor interjection can create a huge interruption in a negative thinking process. Blowing bubbles can be mind-altering. At the next meeting or class offer gum to everyone! When distressed—chew on it! Note of caution: some schools have rules about chewing gum. Ignore those rules. (Kidding)

6 Smash the Wrap: Don't just pop bubblegum, crush some bubble wrap! Pop it with your fingers, knees and toes! Dance on it! Pop it with the help of colleagues! Pop it, in unison, to the beat of music! When in close proximity to others try taking your smashing efforts outside or just grab that stress ball.

7 Spice it UP: Post funny signs, quotes and quips on bulletin boards, in email attachments and even on the floor. Recently some creative college folks produced a newsletter for the inside of bathroom stalls called: "The Flush". They found it was a successful way to promote student events. Another group used laughter quotes and cartoons in their schedule books. Several administrators have found that they can post riddles in a variety of formats. Puns can add spice to any bulletin board. Add funny quotes and memes to tag lines.

8 Try it on Ice: Icebreakers often have a bad rap, but well-thought out activities can be energizing during a class or meeting. Invite other fun-seekers to plan creative options. Do not let humor-doomers keep you from having fun. There are countless ideas for group activities that can be found on line. Kathy Laurenhue's web site <http://www.wisernow.com/> has

many imaginative options.

9 The Write Stuff: Purposeful implementation of humor is a strong anti-anxiety tonic. Notice the funny and journal about it. Just like being physically fit, humor is a habit that requires time and effort. Journaling helps put information into the long-term memory. Repetition and reflection are integral to supporting healthy humor habits. Kelly Epperson has an awesome blog with numerous writing hints to get folks started. <http://kellyepperson.com/>

10 Fit and Fab: We know that the brain operates best with increased the oxygen levels. Practicing humor is a great companion to being physically fit. Explore ways to combine the oxygen generators of laughter and exercise. Seek friends and colleagues who enjoy laughter and spend more time with them. Walk daily with a friend who loves to laugh. Tell them that their sense of humor is appreciated. A supportive friend is the best antidote for stress.

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Additional research and resources are available through AATH (Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor) <http://www.aath.org> AATH is an international, non-profit organization. The AATH Humor Academy is held at the AATH annual conference. The 2019 AATH conference is in Chicago, April 3-7th.

Definitions

* *Humergy*: The energy that emerges from the joy and optimism of our inner spirit, reflects our unique personality and nourishes a healthy mind/body balance (Morrison 2008).

* *Humordoomer*: A person who consistently uses negative humor to control and manipulate