

# HUMOR OVERVIEW

Humor is an important part of youth culture. It is vital for young people to be able to laugh at themselves and others. Listen to any uninhibited conversation, watch their choice of movies, and observe what they read and watch to relax.

The range of humor is wide; from irony to slapstick. There are puns and wit and lots of sarcasm. Nervous insecurity seems to demand making fun of others or oneself. On city streets there are variations of the dirty dozens—a duel of put-downs.

Humor adds delicious spice to life. Most people believe that work, as well as leisure, ought to have fun in it. Youth demand "funniness."

Another important function of humor is relief. The human dichotomy between play and work is not ideal. We need relief from tedium, from insecurities and from pain and fear. The humor of the operating room, morgue, and battlefield illustrates humor's ability to ease unnatural pain. Many great comics have known pain or come out of an ethnic group that has suffered. Many comics have also confessed to deep insecurities.

Humor can help relieve a tense situation. Because there is so much tension in a young person's life, humor becomes very important. Few teenage "sexploitation" films would sell if they were without humor.

The 1980s and some of the 90s saw a decline in adult humor. For many months books like *Tasteless Jokes*, *Truly Tasteless Jokes* were high on the best seller list. These books joked about babies in food processors and on meat hooks and descended to seemingly embarrassing depths. Andrew Dice Clay took stand up comedy to new depths of obscenity laced with overt racism and sexism. Why did we need this kind of humor? Some even speculated that sick baby jokes had some correlation with the rapid rise in abortion rates.

A culture and individuals need to laugh at themselves. Humor needs to be positively used to relieve and elevate the human spirit.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What, do you think, makes something funny? Should there be limits of humor? Is it all right for night club comics to invade the privacy of a young couple sitting in the audience and to belittle their sexual lives? Is it acceptable to take ethnic or gender stereotypes and turn them into derogatory jest?

2. What kind of humor is used in your school or workplace? Can you give examples of that which is healthy and helpful and some which is negative and hurts?
3. How would you set up guidelines and what advice would you give to a teacher or youth leader in his or her use of humor as a communication technique?

## **IMPLICATIONS**

1. We need to understand the nature and place of humor. Discrimination is needed between healthy and sick humor.
2. Young people, especially, need the relief and stimulation that humor can give them. They may not be able to see how negative humor beats them down. Negative humor, from sarcasm to the dozens, does hurt.
3. Good leaders, able to laugh first at themselves, are models of good use of humor. They also use humor in a way that can both relieve and elevate all who laugh together.

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