

The Therapeutic Use of Humor in Treatment and Recovery

Tom Farley and Mark Sanders

June 5, 2024





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The use of affirming language inspires hope and advances recovery.

LANGUAGE MATTERS.

Words have power.

PEOPLE FIRST.

The ATTC Network uses affirming language to promote the promises of recovery by advancing evidence-based and culturally informed practices.



ATTC

Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Thank you for joining us!

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Presenters

Mark Sanders



Tom Farley



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Great Lakes ATTC & Great Lakes MHTTC

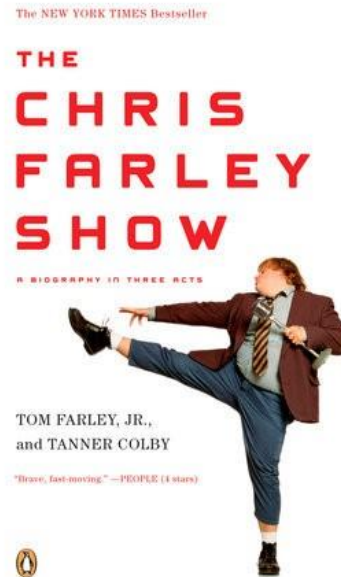


Outline

1. Using Humor and improv to talk about addiction and recovery-Tom Farley
2. The use of humor in counseling relationships:
A focus on counselor self care, rapport building and change-Mark Sanders
3. The use of humor in the epidemic of loneliness-Tom Farley
4. Q & A Discussion

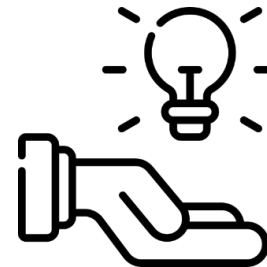
Tom Farley

- Professional Relations Coordinator
 - Rosecrance
- New York Times bestselling author
 - “The Chris Farley Show”
- Motivational Speaker & Recovery Advocate



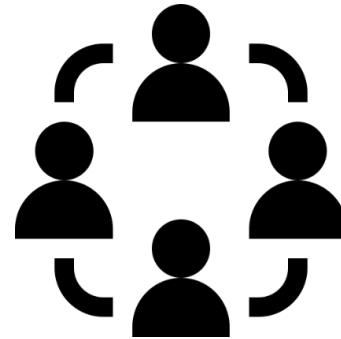
My Story

- Needing to tell Chris's story
- Core audience – schools, teens, young adults
 - Using humor to gain attention
 - Delivering information vs. providing a tool
 - Understanding Improv
- The language of HUMOR – coping skill to trauma



Connection

- Defining connection
- Deep need to bond with others
- Making connections in a safe environment



Starts with Communication

- History of Improv
 - Viola Spolin in Chicago
- Sender-Receiver
- Games to model the concept
 - Clapping games, tell a story, etc.



Yes, and...

- “Yes, and...” is the **GOLDEN RULE** of Improv
- It implies that a participant in a performance (or conversation) should:
 - 1. *ACCEPT* what another participant has offered/stated (the “Yes,”) and then
 - 2. *EXPAND* on that line of thinking (the “and...”)

YES, AND

Improv Guidelines

- **Listen** – be present and aware
- **Defer judgement** – accept the “potential” of ideas and opinions
- **Reframe** – find the positive turn-around; use what you have; share focus and accept all styles
- **Declare your point of view** – be authentic and clear; speak your mind
- **Jump in** – develop a bias towards action and avoid the paralysis of overthinking

Build the Ensemble



Increased Awareness

- Portrays complex emotional issues in a safe environment
- People can talk about a “character” when it’s difficult to talk about their own behaviors
- Characters provide a common reference point (as opposed to an individualized one)



Practice New Behaviors

- Role play workshops allow individuals to practice behaviors in a simulated reality
- If one behavior doesn't work, another one can be tried
 - No real consequences
- This is achieved while the group gives support and suggestions



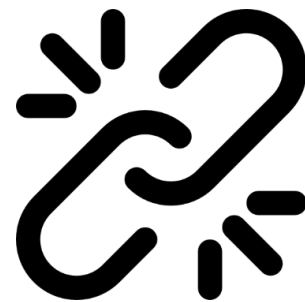
Outcomes

- Working cooperatively to reach a common goal
 - Healing does not occur in isolation
- Accepting others (and other ideas)
- Communicating effectively
- Building trust



Connection

- **Post-COVID Reality** – not to “return to normal”, but to redefine connection
- **Remember:** addiction is a disease of isolation
- **Find Your Ensemble**
- **Surgeon General’s Report – *The Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation***



The Relationship between Individual and Provider

- Laughter shared between the provider and the patient conveys a measure of trust and lightheadedness.
- The association between humor and therapeutic alliance has been highlighted by clinical experience.
- A strong positive association was observed between presence of humor during therapy sessions and various measures of therapy outcome, from both client and therapist viewpoints.
- Research has demonstrated that patients who can share a laugh with medical providers are more likely to trust them and follow their advice.

Incorporating Humor

- ☑ Ask about humor.
 - ☑ *“What has made you laugh recently?”*
 - ☑ *“How often do you laugh?”*
- ☑ Acknowledging any humor expressed.
- ☑ Create a levity journal.
- ☑ Spending time with people who make you laugh.
- ☑ Inventory on sense of humor.
- ☑ Assign humor homework.
- ☑ Schedule time to be silly.
- ☑ Assist to change perspective.
- ☑ Mark teaching points with laughter.
- ☑ Seek feedback.

Important Reminders

- ❗ Laughter can be highly beneficial to both physical and mental health functioning.
- ❗ Balance between using humor as a teaching tool and underscoring the seriousness of the work.
- ❗ Therapist must be cautious when introducing humor into a counseling relationship with a client from another culture or ethnic background.
- ❗ Respecting the client should be valued above all.
- ❗ The use of humor is about the client.
- ❗ You are not in a comedy club waiting for an applause.



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The Therapeutic Benefits of Humor In Substance Use Disorders and Mental Health Counseling Self Care, Rapport Building and Change

Mark Sanders, LCSW, CADAC



Laughter as Prevention of Burnout and Compassion Fatigue For Substance Use Disorders and Mental Health Professionals

Burnout in helping relationships has been called emotional exhaustion and is caused by organizational stress and feeling ineffective in your work with clients. Compassion fatigue is caused by absorbing client's traumatic experiences and has been called secondary trauma, vicarious trauma and secondary PTSD.

Four Burnout and Compassion Fatigue Protective Factors

1. Laughter
2. Centering Rituals
3. Contact with likeminded positive people
4. Meaningful acts of service

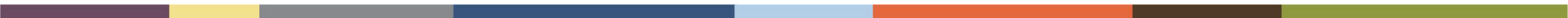
Source: William White, MA

The 5th Factor

5. A best friend at work.



Laughter and Mental Health



Laughter and Mental Health - Endorphins

1. Humor raises endorphin levels in the brain and reduces emotional pain.

(**Source**: Margaret Caudell, M.D., Ph.D., Mind Body Clinic – Boston)

Laughter and Mental Health - Neurochemicals

2. It is also believed that humor activates neurochemicals in the brain, such as dopamine, and thus acts as an antidepressant.

Laughter and Mental Health - Humor

3. The emergence of a sense of humor is one of the signs of mental health and progress in therapy.

(**Source**: The Handbook of Humor, by Krieger)

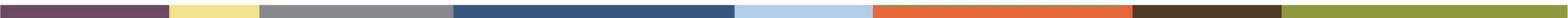
Quotes About Humor

“A sign that you enjoy life is a good sense of humor.”

Vanessa Williams Church

“A good sense of humor is one aspect of self-actualization.”

Abraham Maslow



The Therapeutic Benefits of Humor in Substance Use Disorders and Mental Health Counseling

1. It is the great equalizer.
2. It brings the idealized helper back to life.
3. It can decrease resistance.
4. It can decrease cross-cultural tension.

The Therapeutic Benefits of Humor (2)

5. It can facilitate bonding.
6. It can facilitate self-disclosure – by creating a friendly environment.
7. It can allow some relief from pain.
8. It can allow individuals to change how they perceive a situation.

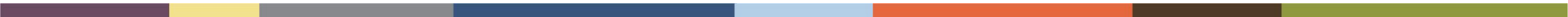
The Therapeutic Benefits of Humor (3)

9. It can ease some of the anxiety caused by taboo subjects
10. It can provide insight.
11. It can decrease stress and anxiety.
12. It can make time fly.

Therapeutic Benefits of Humor (4)

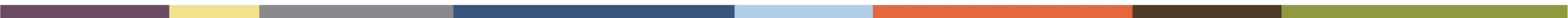
13. Increases talking and eye contact
14. Decreases stigma
15. Helps individuals cope with loss and illness
16. Laughter is contagious. It facilitates bonding in groups.
17. Laughter improves marriage and partnerships

“Someone asked me why I wear my wedding ring on the wrong hand. It’s because I married the wrong person.”



“Marriage is not Heaven and it’s not Hell. It’s purgatory.”

Abraham Lincoln



Utilizing Humor in Counseling

1. Art
2. Role Plays
3. Skits
4. Stories
5. Making Fun of your self
6. The use of humor tools – movie clips, cartoons, anecdotes, signs, prompts, masks
7. Group Exercises

Humor in Groups

1. To be president
2. Peace of mind
3. A good pair of shoes
4. To smoke marijuana with no consequences
5. A gold mine
6. To use heroin with no consequences
7. A new car

Inappropriate Humor

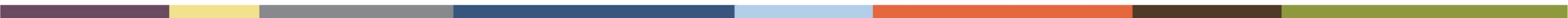
6 Types of Inappropriate Humor

1. Laughing at individuals or groups
2. Cheap shots
3. Put downs
4. Sarcasm
5. Racist and sexist jokes
6. When there's not enough distance from the crisis.

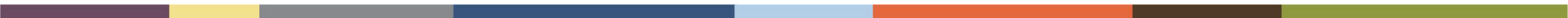
“When I Was A Kid”

1. My favorite game was
2. My favorite food was
3. My favorite cartoon character was
4. My favorite song was
5. My favorite toy was
6. My favorite holiday was
7. My favorite teacher was
8. My best friend was

7 Cousins of Laughter

1. Love
 2. Hope
 3. Faith
 4. Touch
 5. Creativity
 6. Good nutrition
 7. Goals and a sense of purpose
- 

The Epidemic of Loneliness and Humor



The Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation

- U.S. Surgeon General's Report
- “Our epidemic of loneliness and isolation has been an underappreciated **public health crisis** that has harmed individual and societal health. Our relationships are a source of healing and well-being hiding in plain sight—one that can help us live healthier, more fulfilled and more productive lives,” says Dr. Vivek Murthy, US Surgeon General
- The report cites an ongoing decline in social connections—especially among young people.
- This has a profound impact on health, including mental health and cardiovascular health.
- Antidote: “rebuild the social fabric of this country through social connections.”

The Deadliness of “Don’t Talk”

- People often don’t share that they feel lonely
- Our society places shame and stigma on loneliness
- This is internalized for people experiencing loneliness
- When people do share about feeling lonely, listeners often respond with:
 - Going into “fix it” mode
 - Going into blame mode “Well if you just did...X,” or “maybe if you weren’t so...Y or Z...you’d had more friends.”
- Loneliness is especially hard for adolescents to talk openly about