

## **Framework: Humor**

Humor is another form of play involving pretense that children and adults indulge in frequently. From smiling and laughing as infants to linguistic humor development as children we build the groundwork for appreciation and enjoyment of sophisticated comedy as adults. It is personal, culturally based, and dependent on context. It becomes an important tool for social interaction.

### ***Absurdity/Ambiguity/Novelty/Thought, Types, Smiling/Laughter, Stages, Linguistic Humor, Cognitive Flexibility, Social Interaction;***

- Humor arises when an unreal object, action, or idea appears to be absurd or ambiguous compared to its real counterpart. Instances of humor must have some measure of spontaneity, surprise, or novel events. Understanding humor requires the mental states of thinking, guessing, and knowing.
  
- Humor can be physical, linguistic, situational, or a form of mimicry.
  
- Smiling and laughter are outward signs of amusement and are observed in infancy. They most often occur in interactions with a caregiver.
  
- Moving beyond the first year when language begins to develop and there is cognitive advancement, smiling and laughter are used as tools of social interaction. The humor begins to be created with objects and takes the form of an incongruous action or a demonstration of superiority. It requires cognitive flexibility to consider two actions from reality and pretense and then perform the imaginary one in a social interaction.
  
- The following have been recognized as stages of development of humor appreciation. They overlap and change with language and cognitive development. Stage 1: Infants smile and laugh. Humor is used as a social tool for interaction with a caregiver. Stage 2: In this nonlinguistic approach a child will be able to perceive an incongruity in pretend play with objects. An object will be treated as different than what it is. General silliness also occurs. Stage 3: At this point a child begins to sound and word play. Actions are replaced with words. Stage 4: There is situational play with an awareness that things are not right but still based on appearance. Stage 5: With greater linguistic capability riddles, puns, and jokes appear. A child may also restructure events and objects in novel and humorous ways that may no longer be based on appearance or absurdity. The humorous idea or event needs to make sense. It needs to require some thought for understanding to occur or it is not funny.
  
- Linguistic humor can enhance flexible thinking. Thinking about words, sounds, and meanings simultaneously for comparison can lead to amusement. Multiple meanings of words that depend on context for humor require thought to make comparisons and determine relationships. Jokes and riddles contain verbal ambiguity (ambiguous words). Homonyms have the same spelling and pronunciation but different meanings (example - "bill"). Homophones have the same pronunciation but different spelling and meaning (example - "red" and "read"). To be funny one must hold both words/ideas in mind at once. When using one in a specific context the relationship becomes clear and discovery brings amusement.
  
- Cognitive flexibility and linguistic humor develop together. Rich and frequent experiences with linguistic humor may enhance cognitive flexibility and in turn reading comprehension.
  
- Humor is used for social interaction. It can have a positive or negative nature to it depending on the social goals of the user. Jokes can be used to create and reinforce social bonds, relieve tension, conceal discomfort, and avoid embarrassment. They may be used to hold the attention of an audience. Humor can also be used for dark, aggressive purposes that are intended to do harm. The antisocial humor can be direct and open or take the form of an "inside joke" shared privately with a select few. Taboo subjects that are sexual in nature or involve bathroom humor can be amusing but are acceptable only to certain audiences in specific contexts.

***Strategies for Activities, Lessons, and Materials:***

- To explore linguistic humor a child can define and generate words with multiple meanings. The child may also explain multiple meanings in ambiguous sentences, explain ambiguity in compound words, and explain jokes and riddles that contain verbal ambiguity. Identifying ambiguous words in popular children's books also provides opportunities to discuss multiple meanings.
- Colloquialisms such as "beat around the bush" may also occur in humorous contexts and can be explored.
- A child can participate in verbal games like being a homophone detective, playing homophone hangman, finding the fake, write silly stories, and concentration games that match words and meanings.
- A child can locate and discuss words with extra morphemes and affixes.
- A child can generate ambiguous sentences and jokes and riddles.
- A child can discuss instances of humor in books and movies and determine the social interaction goal and judge if it is prosocial or antisocial.
- A child can discuss instances of taboo humor and determine with what audiences and what contexts they might be appropriate.

***A person with autism or other developmental delay might:***

- be reticent to engage in a social interaction that is not for the purpose of obtaining a needed or desired item or action.
- not use acceptable nonverbal communication in social interactions.
- repeat the same jokes with the same audience too many times.
- not pay attention to how an audience receives an attempt at humor.
- use humor that is too childish or immature for an audience.
- use humor that is taboo at unacceptable times or with unacceptable audiences.
- have great difficulty thinking about two ideas at the same time.
- not be amused by linguistic humor.
- focus on the literal meanings in linguistic humor and not understand that it is pretense (not real).
- suffer further reduced reading comprehension if text contains instances of linguistic humor.
- be preoccupied with sensory sensitivities.
- lack assumed skill levels in related areas.

***User Friendly Strategies for Activities, Lessons, and Materials:***

- Incorporate and encourage smiles and laughter at all appropriate points in all appropriate activities.
- Perform humorous actions and speech with many repetitions at the child's current stage of development. Prompt the child to copy a repetition with you and with others.
- An assistant can be used to prompt the child in humor interactions with peers.
- Peers can be chosen that are accommodating and understanding of the help that might be needed.
- Picture sequences and text may help to prepare a person for an interaction.
- Watch videos of social interactions and help to identify audience response.
- Identify humor that is taboo and review times when it is acceptable and audiences that are acceptable.
- Analyze and review instances of figurative speech in personal interactions, T.V., and movies. Use graphics when possible to demonstrate meaning.
- Monitor text for instances of figurative speech and use graphics when possible to demonstrate meaning.
- Observe and detect sensory sensitivities to materials and environment and alter as necessary.
- Observe carefully to detect competencies in order to know what they don't know.

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