

I. ESSENTIAL GUIDANCE NOTES **BEFORE STARTING**

Please read these notes before trying out activities.

THE SCOPE OF A LAUGHTER SESSION **AND GROUP RULES**

The purpose of laughter activities is enjoyment and bringing people together. So:

- A session should last only as long as people are enjoying it.
- It's not a therapy session unless that's the intention and the leader is trained and qualified as a therapist.
- People are encouraged to join in, but not made to do anything.
- The leader finds activities that bring out our appropriate playfulness and lead to laughter for all.

Ground rules cover respect and support for all, confidentiality, looking after ourselves, focus and participation. For each session agree ground rules with participants. For example:

- Be respectful of each other at all times.
- Be respectful of the leader and don't talk when the leader is talking.
- We laugh together and never at each other.
- What happens in the session stays in the session.
- We take responsibility for our own participation.
- Be physically and mentally present, with mobile phones off.
- Don't push anyone into doing anything they don't want to do.
- Laughter and tears are both a release and need space and time and respect.
- Everyone is responsible for their own level of involvement.



The key is tuning in to appropriate playfulness.

WHEN DO WE LAUGH?

We may laugh because our energy is up, or our stress levels are up, or from anticipation, or when something unexpected is happening, or when we are just trying to make sense of life.

Our laughter might express fears and nervousness, anger and frustration, sadness and disbelief, and happiness and joy. A lack of laughter may indicate stress, tears waiting to come out, uncertainty and holding back.

Both laughter and tears are a release of emotions. Laughter doesn't always mean happy, and tears don't always mean sad.

But the more we laugh, the happier we can be!

*Laughter can be good exercise and can
release emotions!*

*Participants are responsible for
whether or not they choose to join in
the activities, and for their own
physical and emotional wellbeing.*

HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

As long as we are well prepared, have the right intention, understand about laughter and don't push anyone into doing anything they're not comfortable with, then generally everything runs smoothly.

Laughter is part of everyday life. However, some of us have emotional and physical limitations and mental and physical health conditions. The leader must ensure people know about health considerations, and that everyone is individually responsible for what they do. It is good to put up a notice explaining this (for example we have used the one above). If people are unsure about joining in then they must ask their doctor for advice.

CREATING THE RIGHT ATMOSPHERE



Appropriate leadership

Leaders gently encourage, demonstrate how things are done, be appropriately friendly and put everyone at ease. Leaders are not there to tell jokes or be centre of attention.

Room layout

Initially have a circle of chairs, or an empty room if people won't need to sit. Don't have trailing wires or sharp edges (such as corners of desks), and have a clean, comfortable floor.

The amount of space

As a guide, pick a room with enough space for everyone to lie down (even though we are unlikely to do this).

Heat, light, sound and fresh air

If the room is too hot we won't have the energy to join in. If it's too cold, we will be uncomfortable. If there is no fresh air, we may get tired. And we need it light and quiet enough so we can see each other's smiles and hear each other's laughs.

Water available to drink

When it's warm or during a longer session it's important to have drinking water available.

Safe space

Everyone needs to feel safe and supported so that we can relax together. If we don't feel safe then we won't join in.

Risk assessment

To make the session safe, do a risk assessment that includes the above, plus health considerations and anything else relevant to your group.

And have insurance to lead group activities.

Your organisation's insurance may cover you. Check it out.

QUALITIES OF THE LEADER(S) **FOR YOUR ACTIVITIES**

One or more person might lead. Each leader must be familiar with the activities.

Leaders lead to bring people together and share a good time.

The leader is not there to be centre of attention. Keep your ego under control.

We facilitate but also need to be in the right mood and frame of mind. We need to be friendly people and enjoy what we are doing.

No need to tell jokes.

Engage with our playfulness appropriately and sensitively.



We lead but are not overly controlling.

Include rather than exclude people. Listen to their suggestions. Let them sit out if they don't want to join in. Don't make the group follow us at all costs. We need to be flexible.

The leader gives clear instructions.

The leader demonstrates the activity, starts and ends the activity, and joins in. If we enjoy the activities and invite people to follow then they will join in too.

The leader will be aware of the environment.

We respond to the energy levels in the room and the environment to keep people as comfortable as possible.

Fears, tears and people's reactions vary.

The experience varies from session to session and activity to activity and person to person. The leader must be empathetic but also not give all their attention to just one person. Be an authentic leader and mindfully in the moment.

Share the relevance.

Sometimes participants need to understand the context of the activities and the background in order to feel comfortable joining in.

Leader guidance.

- Demonstrate the activity with someone, and ensure you are enjoying what you are doing.
- Invite everybody to join in with encouraging language such as, "Let's all go and ...".