

Bomb-Proof Your Jokes

HUMOR CAN BE TRICKY. With ADHD, it can be even trickier. If your joke won't land or you can't hit the punch line, the awkward silence that follows can be deafening.

Jokes change depending on the group, the situation, and the people. Humor is largely about timing, intention, and reading the room. Is your joke appropriate for the audience? Is the energy suitable for this joke? Is your joke dragging on? What is the intention of the joke: to be playful, to point out irony, to speak to life's folly, or a remarkable event?

Add to this self-regulation challenges and you have a bouillabaisse to swim into—and out of.

So, how do you avoid this pitfall?

For the adult with ADHD who wants to land a joke, here's what to gauge.

1. Who is your audience?

Jokes should be adjusted depending on the situation, the people present, your relationship with them, and your comfort level. How you approach someone depends on how well you know them. Whenever you are speaking, consider who is your audience. Ask yourself, *“What is my level of intimacy? What do I know about this person: their sense of humor, their background, and their values?”* Pay

attention to the words they use. Trust builds over time. History and shared experiences may allow you to push the envelope, so to speak. Considering your level of intimacy with someone can help you avoid oversharing or touching on a subject that is too intimate. Not remembering someone's history may actually harm a relationship.

2. Watch body language.

Body language can say a lot about a person. While chatting and joking, ask yourself, *“Does their body language show they are interested and receptive? Are they acknowledging what I am saying by nodding, smiling, and adding to the conversation? Do they face me and look me in the eye? Do they lean in rather than looking around for someone else? Is their laughter on target with my delivery? How is my body language?”* Try to have an open and welcoming stance when greeting someone. Would you enjoy talking with someone who was standing with their arms crossed and looking bored? Your energy, body language, and personal space should align with the level of intimacy.

3. Watch your tone.

Tone is the pitch of your voice and how you stress certain words. When tone is sharp or stinging, it alters the message. Tone can transform a neutral comment into some-



thing rude, disrespectful, biting, or insulting. Zingers may come from a loss of self-control or your own emotional feelings. When you joke with acquaintances or strangers, it's safer to use a light-hearted, chatty, curious, and breezy tone. The tone and intensity of expression should align with the level of intimacy you have with the people with whom you are speaking. Practice saying things with a smile in your voice, then later with a harsh tone. For example, the phrase "That's just what I need" changes depending on your tone.

4. Practice. Practice.

Try joking with someone outside your family and friends group. Practice modifying your tone and energy to come across as calm, quiet, relaxed, nonconfrontational, respectful, thoughtful, detached, curious. The more you practice and enter situations thinking about this as a giant dress rehearsal where you set a mission or intention and try to practice focusing on your tone, body language, and considering the audience, the more you will create neuropathways that hardwire in this experience. Practicing does not have to be high stakes, like learning something new. Practice is imperfect and helps you learn. Practicing is rehearsing and learning to pay attention to adapting your humor to the situation.

5. Pull it all together.

It is easy to see why being a comedian can be challenging. How a message is delivered and received is a fine balancing act. There are thousands of books, TED talks, and business courses on learning to adapt your communication style. Whenever you enter a situation, try to take three beats to look at who is there, what the situation is, and what you know about the people and the circumstances. Calling up that mental database and considering who is your audience can help you begin to adapt your humor.

PEOPLE WITH ADHD are often inherently funny. This is a good thing and to be celebrated. The jokes may bring down the house, or they can bomb. Either way, most of us find the attempt and the intention to be kind, creative, and welcoming. Keep joking! We need more laughter. 🗣️



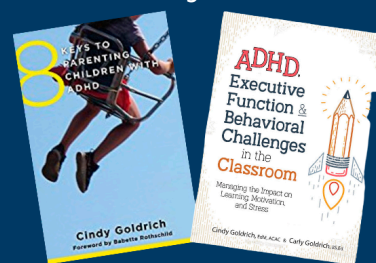
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