1. Understand that humor comes with a pecking order. It is the person who is adversely affected who sets the tone and grants permission (disability, illness, embarrassment, failure, loss). It is generally acceptable for those who are close to the person affected and have shared in their experience to join in and poke fun at the situation. Those who aren’t…shouldn’t.

2. With trauma or crisis, a period of time is often needed to allow for emotional distancing and healing before victims are able or ready to enjoy humor or laughter. Look for cues. (Wait for them to use humor first, or if they are hospitalized, look in their room for signs of funny gifts or cards). Test their mood to check for “play-mode.” If your attempt to use humor fails, stop. Make amends by apologizing and telling them your intentions. (Use humor privately to help you cope.)

3. Always acknowledge their “true feelings” with empathy before attempting humor. “That must have been embarrassing. I bet you felt disappointed.” Humor perceived as an attempt to discount, distract, or ignore a situation that is distressing to the person who experienced it, generally won’t be well received without first acknowledging the situation or empathizing with their feelings.

The greatest gift you can give someone who is struggling is to acknowledge their feelings and praise their effort, courage, determination, or perseverance. Save the pep talks. Just because things could be worse, doesn’t make them better. Sometimes it takes a while for a bright side to show up. The saying, “Things happen for a reason.” That’s what we say to others when we don’t know what else to say. It’s not what we want to hear someone say to us (at that moment).

4. Begin by using self-effacing humor, sharing a similar challenge or pain, “Reminds me of a time when I …” Or, propose a different perspective, “One day we’ll laugh about this. Would this be funny if it happened tomorrow? Next week? Next month? To someone else?” (Co-workers, bosses, or siblings usually generate hearty laughs.)

5. Poke fun at the “situation,” not at the person. This will help them learn how to separate what they do or what happens to them from who they are and teach them how to laugh at unfortunate circumstances or the silly things they do without putting themselves down or making fun of themselves. Check to see if a person is laughing before you make this statement, “I’m not laughing at you, I’m laughing with you.” This is often said to people who are not laughing at their situation.

6. Be aware that someone in crisis can be overly sensitive to laughter, particularly if an injury, loss or major embarrassment has occurred. This may be an area of “wounded-ness” for a while. Pay special attention to notice if they seemed hurt or offended by your laughter, so you can communicate what caused you to laugh and you can assure them you were not laughing at them, nor making light of their situation. “I wasn’t expecting to hear what you said, you caught me by surprise.” Or, “I couldn’t help but laugh when I saw you walk into the closet by mistake. The look on your face when you popped back out was hilarious.”

7. Suggest an activity involving humor, such as watching a comedy, or reading the comics. Find other things to laugh about together. Laughing about past good times also helps restore hope for the future.

スター・スター Hangin’ on with humor when life looks ugly . . . スター・スター

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