



HEALIS AUTISM CENTRE

May 17, 2022 2 min read

Inappropriate Laughter - Why Does It Happen and How Do We Handle It?



Humor is important for children because being able to tell jokes and laugh with others help them with social skills and interpersonal skills.

Laughter creates positive feelings in listeners but why is it that children with autism show inappropriate laughter?

Oftentimes, children with autism do not understand humor and will laugh even when the situation is not funny. This is called the unshared laughter. This spontaneous nature of their giggling is what adds to their charm. However, their laughter can be so untimely and this causes them trouble. Others will look confused while they feel embarrassed.

Darwin (1872/1998) states that laughter can function in both ways, either to signal the occurrence of positive emotions such as happiness and joy or expressing it in a negative state, for example nervousness, shame and danger as a form of masking it rather than displaying them. In addition, based on personal experiences from individuals with autism, the other reason for their laughter is due to random thoughts that pop up in their head and misunderstand information. The main laughter that children with autism produce is the voiced laughter. It is described as a tonal, song-like quality and is associated with positive emotions in typical controls. Not to worry for their laughter is not forced. It is of a lower chance that a child's laugh is due to a nervous response, such as tic or stim.

How do we handle such a situation when a child shows inappropriate laughter?

Humor is important for children because being able to tell jokes and laugh with others help them with social skills and interpersonal skills. Unfortunately, children with autism tell significantly fewer jokes than their typical peers. Studies have found that using jokes or teaching humor and laughter to children with autism can improve social skills and relationships with their peers (Derks & Nezlek, 2001; Martin & Yip, 2006).

Visual tools and concrete examples are the most efficient ways in teaching them the differences between laughing at someone and laughing with someone. It is important for children to make clear distinctions because they both have different social intentions and meanings. When an individual is unable to understand the differences, it may increase the chances of being teased or bullied because they could not avoid those types of interactions. By watching videos of appropriate interactions of age-related peers, children are able to highlight and break down each social scenario before holding a conversation with their peers. Once the child gains better understanding in a controlled environment, contrive it by having them interact with their family members or peers.

For visual humor, cartoons, slapstick comedy and comic books can be used to demonstrate what is considered funny. If a child is able to answer WH Question, ask him or her why it is funny and if he or she is confused about the situation. The alternative

method is the use of social stories. This method is used to increase social interaction. Social stories have been found to be effective in some children with autism. Laughter can be contagious, but we have to correct it if an individual laughs at an inappropriate timing. This is especially so for children with autism as there are various reasons for their laughter and correcting their inappropriate laughter help increase their social skills and relationship with their peers.

Written by Si Jin