

AGENDA

**NCATOD Presentation by
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HUMOR AND THE RECOVERY PROCESS

Theories and Functions of Humor

Humor Development

Humor and the Helping Relationship
(Dos and Don'ts)

Humor and the Stages of Recovery

THEORIES OF HUMOR

1. **Superiority:** Laughter comes from a feeling of superiority over other people or situations.
 - Mastery over past fears and problems
 - The laugher looks down at whatever he laughs at, judging it inferior
 - Moral theories are included in this category. The world as it is, contrasted with the world as it ought to be. The perfect, ideal order vs. the imperfect, actual order.
 - Depicts all humor as satire
 - Hostility, aggression, sarcasm
2. **Incongruity (bisociation):** The thought process headed in a given direction is suddenly turned toward a different direction.
 - Two divergent concepts are brought together to create a new concept
 - The linking of the respected with the disreputable
3. **Release of tension/restraint:** Mental tension, needed for rational thought, becomes too great to continue controlled thinking. There is a wave of emotion and humor ensues to alleviate this tension.
 - Releases us from norms and shows violations of our preconceived ideas of the way things should be
 - Release from inhibitions around aggression and sexual issues. Allows aggressive expression and discussion of otherwise taboo issues
 - Relief of social tension
 - Release of psychological energy through physical activity
4. **Ambivalence:** Conflicting emotions struggle within for mastery.
 - Laughter is our own emotional reaction to things. In situations a person may have two opposing impulses; one to proceed on and the other to check or pull back. Humor is our way of checking a process started. In contrast, external checking results in anger/frustration and energy will be used to struggle against the obstacle.
5. **Shake-up the social pattern:** Humor depends on a fixed background of conventional beliefs, attitudes, and behavior. Humor then upsets the pattern by abruptly introducing something inappropriate. This something cannot be wholly inappropriate, but must include some hidden propriety as well.
6. **Social Psychological:** arousal control functions such as A. when a situation has too low social intimacy, humor is used to gain and maintain attention, and B. situations which are too high in social intimacy, it is used as a safety valve to break attention.
 - Serves to solidify a group or to scapegoat another group
 - An individual within a group may use humor to self disclose taboo interests or events; dissociate from responsibility; save face after an embarrassing situation; unmask hypocrisy; and/or to form positive relationships

SOME THOUGHTS ON HUMOR AND LAUGHTER

Ingredients of humor: Humor is a creation, an art. It is the process of conceptualizing divergent thoughts, bringing them together in a unique way, and presenting this end product in a manner appreciable to others. Humor, therefore, involves the creative use of ideas, symbols, and timing. It requires spontaneity, an understanding of social situations, and a sense of play.

Cognitive Process: Humor is the *ability* to appreciate or express what is funny. In order to appreciate adult humor, an individual must have the mental capacity to understand rules, and abstract concepts and incongruities. In fact, it is the cerebral cortex that tells the body to laugh.

Affective Response: Laughter is the behavioral response to a pleasurable emotion such as joy, happiness, or relief. This behavior can be the demonstration of pleasure from mastering a difficult task to releasing pent up tension from sudden fear.

Physical State: Laughter involves the diaphragm, thorax, abdomen, heart and lungs. The muscles of these organs tighten and relax rhythmically. Arteries are contracted and relaxed by the released hormones called catecholamines. The body's natural painkillers are also released during this process. The end result is a period of internal exercise during a laugh and a tranquil sensation afterwards.

Communication: Often humor is used to approach issues which are seen as socially taboo or which might bring disapproval. By cloaking the message in humor, the risk of rejection and/or punishment is lessened.

A Defense Mechanism: Humor is often used as a means to avoid painful feelings which an individual is afraid to experience. *Laughter* can also be used by an individual trying to hide his/her emotions from others. Humor in the form of sarcasm or put-downs becomes an aggressive defense to veil anger.

Social Aspects of Humor: Laughter is the most socially accepted expression of feelings, making it a vital part of the culture. Humor and laughter map out the boundaries of socially acceptable behaviors through ridicule of those people who inadvertently cross over them. At the same time, humor and laughter allow vicarious violations of these boundaries through appointed representatives – comedians, jesters and clowns. Humor and laughter create social bonding both for groups and between individuals.

Social Taboos: Social norms determine what can be the targets of fun-making. Some cultures have strong taboos about making fun of family, disabilities, or socio-economic status.

Relational Aspects of Humor: There are strong relational bonds that develop between the joke teller and the joke listener because a vulnerability must occur for both for the event to be considered humorous. The joke teller risks being deemed not funny and the listener allows him/herself to be duped. Through these risk taking endeavors a bond is formed.

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF HUMOR

CHILD COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT (Piaget)			DEVELOPMENT OF HUMOR (Valeff)	
<u>AGE</u>	<u>DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE</u>	<u>COGNITIVE</u>	<u>AGE</u>	<u>HUMOR STAGE</u>
Birth – 2	Sensory – Motor	Investigation Discovery	Birth – 2	Surprise Discovery
2 – 7	Pre-operational thought	Begins to deal with symbols	2 – 5	Invention Prankster
7 – 12	Concrete operations	Logic – orderly conceptual frame- work	6 – 9	Foolish comic plays with simple word exchange
			9 – 12	Puzzling riddles
12 – 15	Formal Operations	Conceptualize and abstract	12 – 15	Punning Wit
			15 – Adult	Satirical critic

HUMOR IN THE HELPING RELATIONSHIP

Potential Uses of Humor by the Client

1. An attempt to create a friendly relationship with the helper.
 - The establishment of communicative intimacy with the helper by sharing a joke.
 - Attempt to gain approval or affection from the helper.
2. A need to disarm the helper, due to fear, by a funny self-disparagement.
 - An attempt to communicate hostile feelings towards the helper or others.
 - An attempt to provoke the helper.
3. An attempt to transform fear into a more pleasant feeling.
 - A release of tension arising from the session.
 - An attempt to communicate delicate issues.
4. A defense against anxiety.
 - Self-contempt, symptomatic of depression.
5. Developing a more expansive self-identity.
 - Attempting to accept new, unexpected information about self.
 - Mastery of ability to take distance from disturbing feelings.

Humor in the Helping Relationship

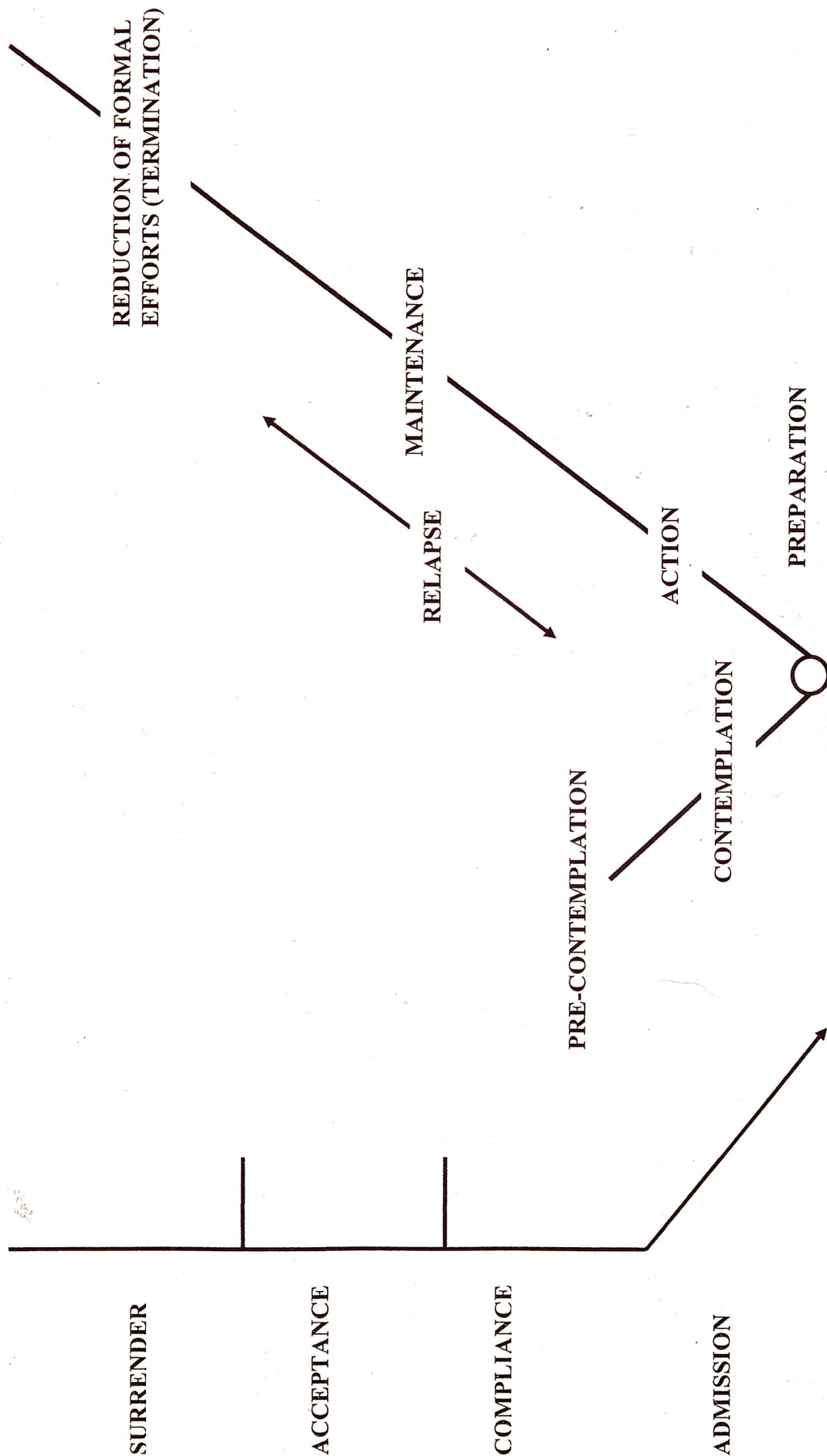
Potential Uses of Humor by the Helper

1. Part of a diagnostic kit to help determine cognitive processes, anxiety level, and conflicts of the client.
2. Reduce tension and/or anxiety.
3. Diffuse aggression.
4. Create rapport with the client.
5. Present a point that the client finds extremely threatening.
6. Deal with difficult or forbidden issues.
7. Facilitate emotional expressiveness.
8. Confront hidden messages in the client's humor and give permission for direct expression.
9. Use as a teaching tool to maintain interest during psycho-educational presentations.
10. Paradoxical techniques to indicate irrationality of thought.

Potential Mis-Uses of Humor by the Helper

1. Sarcasm or put-downs aimed at the client (humor at the client's expense).
2. Belittling matters that the client sees as very serious.
3. Encouraging hostile humor in the client as a means to hide underlying feelings such as anger/sadness/fear/guilt.
4. Cutting off other avenues of communication.
5. Use by the helper to hide own feelings.
6. Inadvertent trespassing of the client's values.
7. Gaining of superiority.

CHANGE AND RECOVERY CHART



HUMOR AND THE RECOVERY PROCESS

I. A General Understanding Of Humor

A. Theories of Humor

1. Superiority
2. Incongruity
3. Release of Tension
4. Ambivalence
5. Defining and/or Attacking the Social Pattern
6. Social Psychological Ideology

B. Functions of Humor

1. Mental Appreciation and Positive Wit
2. Encourages Shared Mental Pleasures
3. Internal. physiological exercise
4. Communication
5. Social Bonding
6. Development of Social Boundaries
7. Defense Mechanism

II. Comparison of Human Development and Humor Development

A. Developmental Stages by Piaget

1. Cognitive Growth Within Each Stage

B. Developmental Stages by Valett

2. Types of Humor Within Each Stage

III. Humor and the Stages of Recovery

A. How humor presents in each stage of recovery

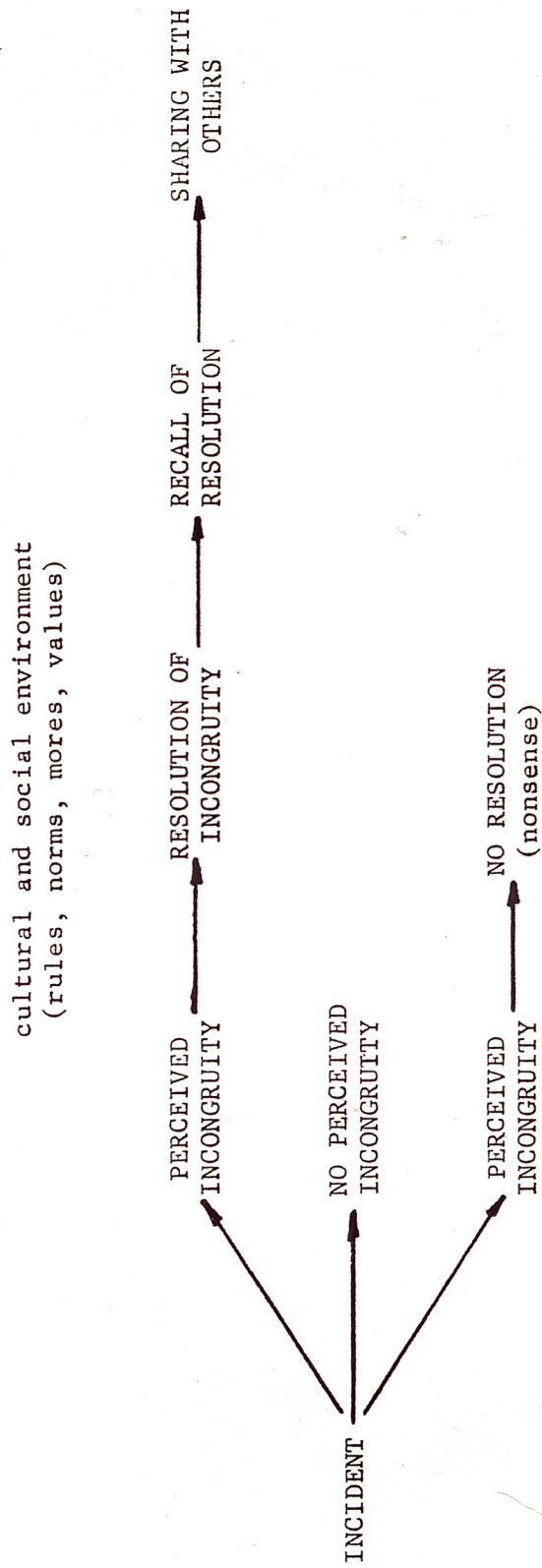
1. Its parallels with developmental needs
2. The uses and mis-uses of humor by the client

B. The counselor's use humor in each recovery stage as a therapeutic tool

IV. Humor and the Helping Relationship (The Dos and Don'ts)

A. Ten (10) general uses of humor by the helper

B. Seven (7) potential mis-uses of humor by the helper



cultural and social environment
(rules, norms, mores, values)

INCONGRUITY-RESOLUTION THEORY