

Humor, Entry #1 of 2

The way we share...finding humor in some of the darkest, most frightening things that have happened to us—is not always available outside the rooms (*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, “Connection to the World Around Us”).

In NA, we often get to know each other from the inside out. “I knew the biggest hopes and fears of some of the members of my homegroup before I knew their last names or what kind of jobs they had,” one member shared. We may never know the inner life of non-addicts the way we know each other in NA—and it’s a big part of why we’re able to laugh with (sometimes *at*) each other in NA.

Humor often comes in the form of a surprising or unexpected gap between expectation and reality. In society, there are lots of expectations about how people ought to act around one another—expectations that we addicts disregard completely. Sometimes that’s the joke: “normal” people act one way; we addicts act very differently. We hear others share about bizarre ideas and actions, we identify and relate, and we’re relieved that we’re not alone.

Other times, the difference in the expectation and reality is what we expected when we were using—how we saw our lives versus how our lives were actually going. “I thought my life was like something out of a big-shot gangster movie, money and drugs and lots of drama. In reality, it was more like a depressing ad for keeping your kids off drugs.”

Humor helps us heal as we come to terms with the reality of our lives. We see the outrageous gap between our behaviors and what “polite” society expects. (Of course there are gaps—we’re square pegs in round holes!) Or we notice the laughable distance between our lives and our fantasies. We share our inner life in a way we can’t anywhere else, and our fellow members laugh at us (and *with* us). We stop taking ourselves so seriously, laugh at our flaws, and start to grow.

By sharing my insides with other addicts, I can learn to laugh at the insanity of addiction—and let go of it, little by little.

Humor, Entry #2 of 2

One of the gifts of recovery is regaining our sense of humor (*Living Clean*, Chapter Seven, "The Lifelong Practice of Surrender").

When we were using, everything was life-or-death serious—that lifestyle of getting, using, and finding ways and means to get more! Some of us felt like we hadn't laughed for years when we first got to NA. Others of us experienced plenty of laughter out there—directed right at us. "You're so thin-skinned," our mates would mock us. "Get a sense of humor."

While actual events of our using history stay the same, our relationship to them evolves as we grow in recovery. We see fellow NA members finding humor in their pasts, and we begin to lighten up about the darkness in ours. Our stepwork reveals a long list of defects that still affect us today. And being able (finally) to laugh at ourselves as we act out on that shortcoming—yet again!—is a strategy that can help us to not beat ourselves up and to be okay with where we are right now. Humor becomes a way we identify, connect, and express empathy and forgiveness, for others as well as ourselves. Humor is a practice of surrender.

For many of us, humor can also be a hazard. It's a strategy we may use to escape our feelings or avoid being real in our relationships. We sometimes use it to put people down, including ourselves. Self-deprecating humor has a place, but self-ridicule breeds self-doubt. Some of us used humor to survive out there, but in recovery we aren't living in that life-or-death cycle. As we become more aware of these issues through working our program and receiving input from our sponsor and others we trust, our relationship to humor may shift. Ideally, the sense of humor we gain in recovery becomes less self-pitying, protective, or aggressive than the one we came in with. And we can finally breathe because we don't take ourselves quite as seriously as we used to.

I will try to surrender to levity today. I can laugh at myself without derision, and do the same for my fellow addict, with love, sensitivity, and wit, if I have a bit of that.