

Bonding the family with laughter

by Lisa McKimm



I love laughing. I always think of laughter as social glue. If you share it with complete strangers, you are instantly bonded. But it is even more miraculous when sharing it with your family.

Some of my best memories of my Dad are of the times that we sat wheezing with laughter at things that nobody else got. I don't even remember what most of them were now. What I do remember is the connection between us because we shared those moments.

Having always laughed a lot with my own four kids, I recall recently being delighted when my twenty two year old son enthusiastically told me that he had a video for us to watch together. It was comedian Harry Enfield's 'Kevin's Guide to Being a Teenager'. Harry's spot-on take offs of a teenaged Kevin are brilliant, and you'll recognise them with mirth if you have ever struggled to get your adolescent son to clean his bedroom or the family car or watched him hopelessly paint himself into a corner with a 'slight fabrication of the truth' that he doesn't have the nouse to remember for later.

As we hooted over Kevin's bellowed reproached to his parents, we were doing something that I regularly recommend to parents in groups and seminars. Making memories of fun together. Because that's what we are as parents. Memory Makers. We can make great ones or lousy ones – they both take energy.

Here's one really good reason to make the positive ones. One day, your kids will sit on your grandchildren's beds at tucking-to time. When they get asked to "Tell me about Nana (or Grandad) when you were little – they will use their memories to tell their stories. Will they base their tales on memories of grumpy, stressed, hard-to-please parents? Or will they tell of warm, fun-filled times? If you think that there may be a considerable influence from the former, then it is certainly time to take a step back, and find ways to introduce more laughter, spontaneity and relaxation into your life.

I learnt a great lesson in this myself when our second daughter turned five years old. As usual, I had knocked myself out making a cake (we had the Castle that year!); climbed trees to hide treasure hunt clues; blown up balloons until I thought that I had done permanent damage to my cheeks; and had a serious need for Panadol before the guests even arrived. The party went well, whilst I ran my tail off the whole time. It was a relief to see the army of mothers arrive to pick up their offspring after three hours had elapsed, but I felt we had celebrated in style.

The next day, a friend of our daughters' stood up for news at school and announced, 'I had a cool time at Lucy's party yesterday because...her Dad chased us with a school bag over his head!' Oh the agony for me! But a brilliant lesson nevertheless. After all the effort that had been put in by me that day, the best memory making moment had been provided by a little spontaneous madness by her Dad.

Lessons like this have provided me with a strong commitment to inspiring other parents to chill out, and take moments to have a little more fun. To make great memories with, and for, their kids is a glorious goal to work towards.

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