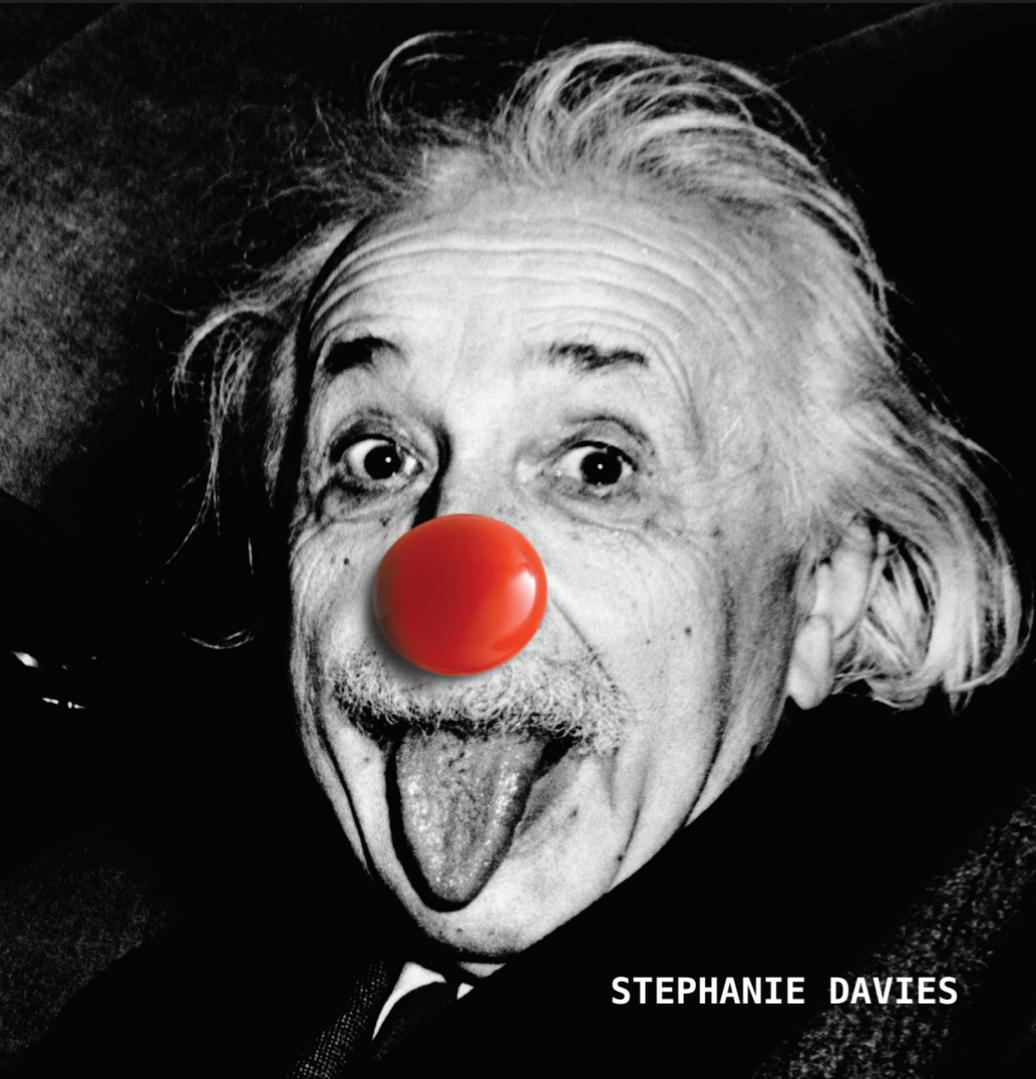




LAUGH**O**LOGY

IMPROVE YOUR LIFE WITH

{ $\Omega \div \heartsuit \geq \text{😊}$ THE SCIENCE OF LAUGHTER $\Omega + \heartsuit \Sigma \text{😊}$ }



STEPHANIE DAVIES

PRAISE FOR *LAUGHOLGY*

Well written and funny ... Stephanie Davies has created a toolkit for helping us to positively reframe our daily lives and for putting laughter at the heart of who we are.

**Dr David Perrin, Centre for Work Related Studies,
University of Chester**

Laughology is a wonderful idea and gives people the tools to live life to the full by linking humour, emotion, psychology and health.

**Professor Richard Wiseman,
University of Hertfordshire, author of *59 Seconds***

It is too tempting not to say it – go on, you're pulling my leg. Someone flogging a book about laughter! Tell me another one (all said, of course, in a Cockney accent, preferably whilst wearing a John Bull bowler hat and quaffing manfully from a pint glass). How surprised was I to open the pages of this book and find a deeply compassionate exploration of the human condition through the medium of Laughology – the technique of life enhancement through laughter. This is too superficial a description however. Stephanie has taken one of the simplest and most generic of human emotional expressions – the laugh – and, with insight and intelligence, dug deep beneath its public face (my brain is playing old Frankie Howerd footage as I write) to find explanations in surprising places.

As a neurobiologist I am very aware of the effects of emotional states on the brain, but Stephanie expands and develops on this in a beautifully constructed piece of work that is understandable to anyone. Ultimately life is about finding ways to reframe the bad, not to ignore it but to make it manageable, to allow your brain the space to deal with the crap. As Stephanie so brilliantly points out in this book, actually that reframing can as easily be done with a smile or a laugh as with any over-earnest or deep exploration of areas that you would rather leave alone. Laugh and the world laughs with you. Maybe, though there is so much political correctness out there now it's sometimes hard to know when you can laugh. But you can certainly adopt Stephanie's approach – laugh and your internal world may learn to laugh with you. That sounds like a good result.

**Andrew Curran, practising paediatric neurologist and
neurobiologist, author of *The Little Book of Big
Stuff about the Brain* and *Get Off the Sofa***

You'd have to be agelastic, or even misogelastic, to keep a straight face through this playful and practical guide.

**Dr Jon Sutton, chartered psychologist and
managing editor of *The Psychologist***



LAUGH**O**LOGY

**IMPROVE YOUR LIFE WITH
THE SCIENCE OF LAUGHTER**

STEPHANIE DAVIES



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To all the people I have had the privilege of working with and helping over the years – you have all helped me as much as I have hopefully helped you. To the wonderful children, young people and carers at Claire House Hospice in Merseyside who continue to inspire me every day. But most of all this is to my family who are all brilliant and funny.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all the services that have believed in and used the Laughology model through the years and who continue to use it to improve lives and potential.

I would also like to thank Caroline Lenton who believed in *Laughology*, the book, and the team at Crown House for giving me the opportunity to write it.

My mum who has been a supporter and promoter of Laughology from the beginning. My dad, who always has made me laugh and encouraged me to believe I can be and do anything. My step-mum Marian, Aunt Michele, Susie, Paul and cousin Alex who tirelessly drove me to gigs and events and listened to my comedy material before it was funny, but supported me and clapped as if it was. My brother Daniel and sisters Ruth, Fiona and Beth and step-brother Paul who all make me laugh and have believed in me from the very beginning and have supported me through the triumphs and tribulations of running a business which hasn't seemed so funny at times. All my nieces and nephews who continue to remind me of the importance of having a young outlook, playing and having fun: Ryan, Jade, Jack, Ben, Max, Holly and Thomas. My wonderful partner Nick Harding who has been the main ingredient for my happiness and who took the time to cast his experienced eye over my humble writings, and Millie and Lucas who sat patiently and played while he did.

To all my wonderful friends, I cannot name them all, but each is important and has supported me and constantly asked, 'So when is the book out again?', making sure I did actually finish it.

And a huge thank you to the brilliant Laughology team, Kerry Leigh, Juliette Yardley, Alan Matthews, David Keeling and Maurice De Castro,

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who continue to promote and build Laughology and without whom I wouldn't have been able to spend time writing this book.

Thank you all.

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Laughology is a tool to help you improve your life in every way, so this book has been written as a practical guide with exercises for you to do throughout. Use this book, write in it, underline bits you like, add your own notes in the work pages at the back and record your own thoughts.

The concepts and exercises presented in this book are particularly for those who want an alternative attitude and way of thinking for improving life and work. The benefits of using humour as a system for processing information will be shown in a practical and descriptive way. Do try to complete the exercises in each chapter – this will help you to use the Laughology model, personalise the experience and think realistically about how you can apply Laughology in your life. Along the way there will be case studies (with names changed to protect identities). You will learn how real people have used Laughology, what worked for them and how you can benefit. If you follow the simple guidelines they'll work for you too. Remember: this is a new way of thinking so you will have to practise and work at it. Like anything, the more you put in, the more you'll get out of it. Each chapter also includes a summary of the key learning points.

Laughology is also based on my personal successes in improving the life and work of clients from many different backgrounds. Laughology has been used by thousands of people nationally and internationally in a variety of different settings: in blue-chip companies to boost staff morale and productivity, in retail businesses to improve customer service and in rehabilitation programmes to enhance recovery. It has also been used by public health bodies to help people with a range of mild to more severe mental health issues.

There's a reason why Laughology has been and is so successful: it works, it's simple, it makes you feel better and anyone can do it. More importantly, it's sustainable because humour and laughter are coping skills that we all possess and have the ability to develop. This book is a simple guide to help you do this.

SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

This book has been written so it can be used as a practical guide; therefore I want to make it as easy as possible for you to use, dip in and out of, write in and refer to whenever and wherever you like.

The book follows a basic pattern with Part One structured in the following way:



Story relating to the topic.



Explanation of what we are talking about – a general understanding of the topic in *context*.



The *science* – a scientific explanation of the topic using popular psychology such as cognitive-behavioural therapy and recent research to support why the theory and application work.



Practical application – each chapter has practical exercises to go with the topic. These will help you understand more deeply how this can relate to you and your life.



Points to remember – at the end of each chapter you'll find a short summary of the important things to remember.

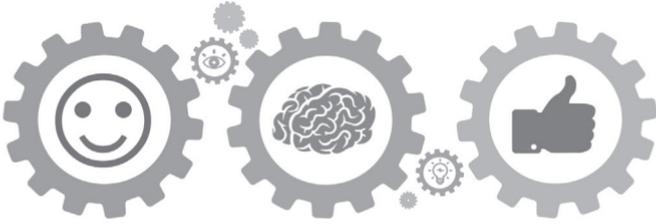


In Part Two I describe the Humour Toolkit, FLIP (Focus, Language, Imagination, Pattern breaking), which will give you the ability to improve the way you look at life by building cognitive skills. These chapters are laid out differently and focus on how to use FLIP in everyday life.



In Part Three I outline the five steps of SMILE (Smile, Moment of magic, Impulse, Laughter, Empower); a simple process to finding positives in your life. This chapter is more practical and also differs from the guides in Part One.

PART ONE



STORY, CONTEXT, SCIENCE,
PRACTICAL APPLICATION,
POINTS TO REMEMBER

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS LAUGHTER?



A TIME AND A *PLAICE* FOR LAUGHTER

While visiting a secure mental health hospital in West Virginia with Dr Hunter 'Patch' Adams and his team it struck me just how powerful laughter can be in helping to build relationships and communication with others.¹ I had teamed up with some fabulous people from the Gesundheit! Institute and we had been to various centres and hospitals around the region using laughter and humour to help bring joy to a diverse range of patients.

As we were leaving the final hospital there was a room no one had entered. I peeked in and noticed a man, perhaps in his mid-forties, in a chair, rocking back and forth, making a noise and in a state with which I was unfamiliar. It was at this point that I questioned what I was doing. Was taking laughter into places like this beneficial or was I way out of my depth? I had never encountered a situation like this before and

1 In 2006 I was lucky enough to win a scholarship to join Patch Adams and his team at a training centre in West Virginia. Patch is one of the pioneers of humour and laughter in health care and has worked tirelessly over the past 30-plus years to promote peace, happiness and justice around the world. A film, *Patch Adams* (starring Robin Williams as Patch), was released in 1998 and helped to promote Patch's vision and story. It publicised the work of the world famous Gesundheit! Institute, a hospital and wellness centre where humour, happiness, creativity and positivity are as important as medical knowledge and scientific practice.

wondered whether to walk on, as most of the others had done, or to test my understanding of the power of laughter and step into the room.

Armed with nothing but my sense of fun and a plastic fish I decided this was it: I had to go in to either prove or disprove everything I had believed in up to this point. Could this individual's life be improved with laughter, humour and a smile? Could I reach out to this person with something so simplistic when he seemed so far removed from this world? I was unsure how I would even start.

I entered the room and bent down by his side, smiling, trying to catch his eye, using the prop and the last ounce of energy I had. As he looked at me I could see that there was a way I could connect with him, so I did everything in my power to make him laugh. I waved my plastic fish, made some silly noises and told some funny stories about my day. All of a sudden the man let out a huge guffaw. I don't know whether he was laughing at me or with me (perhaps he was thinking 'it should be you in here!'), but whatever it was, we connected; we connected on a level that was wonderfully friendly, happy and equal. His laughter only lasted about ten seconds but afterwards his whole face had lifted and he made eye contact with me until we said our goodbyes.

At that moment it was confirmed to me that laughter is a powerful communication tool that can be used with anyone anywhere. Laughter knows no boundaries when it comes to age, race or gender. A laugh or a smile in Iceland is the same as a laugh or a smile in India or England – what a great level of communication to get by on!



THE FEEL-GOOD FACTOR

We have all been supplied with the ability to laugh. Research suggests that it is innate because, as Donald Brown points out in his book *Human Universals*, laughter is found in every society – even children who are deaf and blind, and can't see or hear other people laughing, still laugh.² Robert Provine, in his book *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*, puts forward the theory that laughter is a form of com-

2 D. Brown, *Human Universals* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991).

CHAPTER 13



THE POWER OF A SMILE

Smiling is a universal language – it is one of the few facial expressions that is understood across all cultures and languages, and could be older than mankind. Professor Jan van Hooff, a well-known expert of emotional facial expressions in primates, argued that the bare-teeth display of chimpanzees is homologous to the human smile.¹ But you don't have to delve into scientific tomes to find proof of the universal nature of the smile – you just have to watch children playing.

A friend of mine had taken her 5-year-old daughter on holiday to Spain. It was the first time the youngster had been abroad and, like most kids on vacation, she found a friend to play with on the beach. She set about building sandcastles and paddling with her new pal.

After an hour or so it was time for lunch and my friend called her daughter back.

'What is your friend's name?' her mum asked.

'I don't know,' replied the little girl, 'she doesn't talk like I do.'

Puzzled, my friend asked how they had managed to understand each other, to which her daughter answered: 'She had the same laugh and the same smile as me.'

A natural smile usually begins with our senses. We see, hear, smell or taste something and the emotional data is channelled to the brain

1 J. van Hooff, 'A comparative approach to the phylogeny of laughter and smiling', in R. A. Hinde (ed.), *Non-Verbal Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 209–240.

where it is interpreted and manifests in a facial expression. Smiles are created by two muscles: the zygomatic major in the cheek which contracts and pulls the lips upward, and the orbicularis oculi which encircles the eye socket and squeezes the outside corners (creating crow's feet!). Other muscles can stimulate a smile, but only these two together produce what is recognised as a genuine expression of positive emotion. Psychologists call this the 'Duchenne smile', named after French anatomist Guillaume Duchenne, who studied facial expressions by stimulating various muscles in the face with electrical currents.

Smiling is something simple we can all do to help ourselves and others. Just the action of smiling helps us feel better. In psychology the theory of facial feedback postulates that 'involuntary facial movements provide sufficient peripheral information to drive emotional experience';² in other words the act of smiling in itself elicits emotions. In simple terms, you can improve your mood by smiling. A number of research projects support this hypothesis. Studies have also shown that when you mimic someone else's facial expressions it may cause you to feel empathy for the other person. As Marianne LaFrance, author of *Lip Service: Smiles in Life, Death, Trust, Lies, Work, Memory, Sex, and Politics* says: 'Smiles are universally recognized and understood for what they show and convey, yet not necessarily for what they *do*. Smiles are much more than cheerful expressions. They are social acts with consequences.'³ When you smile, the world really does appear better.

Laughter and smiles are not always appropriate in depressing situations but research does prove that smiling helps people in difficult circumstances – the reason why gallows humour is so commonly displayed by those employed in challenging vocations. In a study by Dacher Keltner and George Bonanno of the Catholic University, the facial expressions of people were recorded when they discussed a recently deceased spouse.⁴ The researchers found lower levels of dis-

2 D. A. Bernstein, A. Clarke-Stewart, L. A. Penner, E. J. Roy and C. D. Wickens, *Psychology*, 5th edn. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

3 M. LaFrance, *Lip Service: Smiles in Life, Death, Trust, Lies, Work, Memory, Sex, and Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).

4 D. Keltner and G. A. Bonanno, 'A study of laughter and dissociation: the distinct correlates of laughter and smiling during bereavement', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 73 (1997), 687–702.

tress in those who displayed genuine Duchenne smiles during the discussion compared to those who did not.

The benefits of smiling through grief appear to occur on a biological level as well. Barbara Fredrickson and Robert Levenson observed the facial expressions made by 72 people watching a funeral scene from the film *Steel Magnolias*.⁵ The 50 participants who smiled at least once during the clip recovered their baseline cardiovascular levels more quickly than others who failed to smile.

Not only do people deduce useful information from smiles, they also use this knowledge to direct their own behaviour. In an experiment, researchers found that people showed a greater preference for working with individuals displaying genuine Duchenne smiles than those bearing false smiles.⁶

The ability to draw on a genuine smile, using tried and tested laughter triggers, is thus a skill that will not only make you feel good but will benefit those around you. In many cultures smiling is highly valued. Buddhists use the act of smiling to bring about a feeling of peace and serenity. As Zen master and famed peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh says: 'Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.'

Laughology uses an acronym which can help us to live a happier life every day if we stick to these five simple SMILE rules:

- 1 **Smile.** Take active steps to be aware of how frequently you smile. Note how many times you smile each day and try to increase this by 10%. When you start to smile more, be aware of the changes in the way you feel and in the way others react to you. At first you may feel like a fake, but as I've explained, we are primed to recognise genuine smiles so if you use your laughter triggers to bring about a smile it will be genuine. It may feel odd at first – smiling is learnt behaviour and you may have grown up in a household where there was not much laughter or smiling – but practice makes perfect. Smiling is a natural act so

5 J. J. Gross, B. L. Fredrickson and R. W. Levenson, 'The psychophysiology of crying', *Psychophysiology* 31 (1994), 460–468.

6 M. J. Bernstein, D. F. Sacco, C. M. Brown, S. G. Young and H. M. Claypool, 'A preference for genuine smiles following social exclusion', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 46 (2010), 196–199.

you will soon feel comfortable. If you are about to make a tricky phone call, smile before you dial. If you are about to go into an awkward situation, stop and smile before you walk through the door. Use your smile as a primer to switch on positivity.

- 2 **Moment of magic.** Look for opportunities to do good for other people and create a moment of magic in someone else's life. Acting selflessly results in lots of positive emotions. This isn't just anecdotal – research has shown that activity in the reward centre of the brain increases when you do something altruistic.⁷ Sadly we get so busy and caught up in our own lives that we often let opportunities to help others pass us by; and by ignoring them we pass up the opportunity to enrich our own lives. A moment of magic can be anything from helping an elderly person to cross the road to assisting someone who looks lost. Start to look around you for people who may need some help: does that man at the train station need directions? Does that old lady need a hand with her shopping? Opportunities to assist others are usually fleeting so act on them quickly; don't stop to analyse the situation. Helping people and carrying out kind acts helps you understand more about yourself and what makes you happy. It also enables you to have a better perspective on your own advantages and appreciate how lucky you are. If all you think about is yourself, all you will understand is yourself. Just one act of kindness will elicit a smile from another person and their smile may transfer to someone else too. What a brilliant chain reaction.
- 3 **Impulse.** Act on your positive impulses. Modern life is not conducive to impulsive action; thanks in part to technology we delegate many decisions in our lives and are led in the choices we make. For example, typing in a destination on a sat nav will give you the most efficient route but it may not give you the most interesting one. Whenever you use a search engine the results you get back are based on what the software thinks you prefer based on your past patterns of use. Shopping has become less impulsive as supermarkets record our buying patterns and use them to inform our future choices. Even dating and finding

7 D. Tankersley, C. J. Stowe, and S. A. Huettel, 'Altruism is associated with an increased neural response to agency', *Nature Neuroscience* 10 (2007), 150–151.

your ideal partner has been outsourced to computer programmes which are designed to match you with personality types similar to your own. While all these advances are helpful, they take away opportunities for us to act spontaneously and use our instincts and intuition. It is often impulsive behaviour that shifts our lives in new and interesting directions – and it adds variety, which we all know is the spice of life. Generally people tend to stagnate – they analyse and act on reason. But if you have a positive thought it is generally a good one. Don't try to unpick it and add negatives, just do it. If you stop and think too much, you will find you are forever talking yourself out of things. Get involved!

- 4 **Laughter.** Think about where you can create more laughter in your life and the lives of people around you. What do you do in your family and in your relationships that brings about laughter? Try to increase these activities and work out how you can create more of them. Keep a laughter diary for a week and review it daily. Write down how many times you laugh during the day and what makes you laugh. If at the end of the day you feel as though there has not been enough laughter in your life, use your laughter triggers the following day to create more.
- 5 **Empower.** Empower yourself in a positive way. Use Laughology to help yourself, and others, to boost levels of happiness, confidence and well-being. Give yourself permission to dictate your mood and how you see the world. How you cope with the stresses and strains that life inevitably throws at you will define how you move forward and the way you feel about life in general. Use laughter and humour to bring about the positive changes you want to see in your life. Take control of your own happiness – don't wait for other people to make you happy or sit around waiting for things to change. People stuck in a rut often look to some future event, such as a holiday or a change in circumstance, and pin their hopes on this to create happiness. How many times have you heard (or said), 'I'll feel better when ...'? Rather than wait, empower yourself and act now to feel better. I have often heard people saying 'I want to empower you.' My belief is you are not given empowerment, you take it!



The Laughology method helps with thinking skills, encourages positive engagement and organisational development. It promotes great leadership skills and enhances health and well-being.

As a company we deliver training to small and large organisations in the private and public sector in settings as diverse as schools, hospitals and multinational blue chip companies.

For general enquiries or to make a booking for any of our courses, workshops or consultancy services visit our website www.laughology.co.uk or contact:



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'Laughology is a wonderful idea and gives people the tools to live life to the full by linking humour, emotion, psychology and health.'

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Dr David Perrin,
Centre for Work Related Studies, University of Chester

Laughology is a practical guide to using laughter and humour to make you feel better and enable you to communicate more effectively. This book explains simple techniques that will improve your ability to gain a more positive perspective in difficult situations and to increase your happiness through adopting the techniques from the Laughology model.

You will learn:

- The science behind humour and laughter
- The psychology of why we laugh
- How to think differently using humour
- How to harness positive emotions and feel better
- More effective communication and decision making

'Ultimately life is about finding ways to reframe the bad – not to ignore it, but to make it manageable. As Stephanie so brilliantly points out in this book reframing can as easily be done with a smile or a laugh as with any over-earnest, in depth exploration of areas that you would rather leave alone.'

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Dr Jon Sutton,
Chartered Psychologist and Managing Editor of *The Psychologist*



STEPHANIE DAVIES is recognised as one of the UK's leading voices in the psychology of laughter and humour. She has over ten years' experience of developing interventions that have been applied in a wide variety of settings, dealing with complex public and mental health issues and building teams in high profile organisations. She is an award-winning stand up comedian who has worked with world-renowned Dr Patch Adams exploring the relationship between health, humour, community and the arts.



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