As a parent, when all else fails, sometimes all you can do is laugh. But did you also know that finding the humour in a situation is actually a helpful coping skill that, when used correctly, can be very effective? For starters, laughter helps give you some objectivity and allows you to find common ground with your child, even during an interaction that might have been tense and angry moments before. Simply put, it’s hard to be mad and laugh at the same time. As you’ve probably noticed in your own life, the ability to find the humour in a situation can instantly dissolve a fight or help us relate to one another in a new way.

Remember, how we look at things affects how we choose to react or respond to a situation. The ability to view the situation from a lighter perspective, when it’s appropriate, can help keep you calm and help you respond from a more thoughtful place, rather than from an emotional one.

It’s important to note that one of the very first things we do in life is laugh, before we speak or even walk. There’s a reason people say, “Laughter is good for the soul,” and “Laughter is the best medicine”—there really is that physical benefit, because it relieves stress and benefits your circulation and respiratory system, to name just a few things. Not only that, but as Bill Cosby says, “Through humour, you can soften some of the worst blows that life delivers. And once you find laughter, no matter how painful your situation might be, you can survive it.”

### 7 Ways to Use Humour Effectively as a Parent

**Remember, it’s about the situation, not the person.** The number one rule about using humour with your child is that the laughter should always be about the situation, and not about the person. If you laugh at your child, that can be shaming—and will probably cause their anger to escalate. Here’s an example from Kim’s life: When her ODD son was about 11 years old, he was mad about something and went to kick a cabinet door in the kitchen. In doing so, he slipped and fell on the floor, not hurting himself. They both started laughing at the absurdity of the situation, and he completely forgot what he was angry about in the first place. In that moment, Kim was able to look at him and say, “Okay, c’mon, that was funny. I love you, but that was funny.”

As a parent, the question to ask yourself with humour is, are you joining with your child—is it shared humour? Or are you laughing at your child? Laughing at someone’s pain, hopes, fears or beliefs isn’t funny, but laughing together during a silly moment can do wonders to bridge a gap or defuse a fight.

Above all, you don’t want to hurt your child’s feelings—that’s not the goal here. You don’t want to laugh at something that’s important to him or her. And of course, it’s never good to laugh when your kid has been hurt physically or emotionally.

**Learn to laugh at yourself.** As a parent, it’s good to laugh at yourself once in a while. This is also something that we can model for our kids. It’s so important to show them how to refrain from taking themselves so seriously all the time, and that it’s okay to laugh when you make a mistake.
You can even chuckle, shrug and say, “I can’t believe I was so steamed about that customer who cut in line at the bank today. I should’ve just let it go. I guess I was just in a bad mood or something.” By doing this, you’re literally showing your child how to “laugh it off.”

**A question that can help your child.** A great question to ask when things are getting tense is, “Wow, why are we arguing about something so small?” This pulls both of you out of the argument, lightens the mood, and gives you some objectivity and perspective. Let’s say you want to see one movie but your child would rather go to another, and you start to argue. You can calm things down by saying, “Okay, this is silly, huh? You pick the movie this time, and I’ll pick the next one.” That way, you are modelling to your child how to change the mood and put things into perspective.

**Focus on your child’s strengths.** One parent we knew had a son who would argue and argue, no matter what was at stake. He *always* had to have the last word, and his mum said it was exhausting. One day when he was explaining yet again why he shouldn’t have to do his chores, she thought to herself, “Man, someday he’s going to make a really good lawyer. I can just see him up there arguing in front of a judge. And the judge is going to say, ‘Oh my Lord, enough already!’” The mum didn’t share this with her son in that moment—he would have gotten defensive and angry—but it helped her put his behaviour into perspective and have a moment of private amusement.

**For Parents of Defiant or Oppositional Kids:** For parents of really defiant, oppositional kids, it may feel like there’s nothing to laugh at. Life can get so difficult with these kids—it can become very intense and exhausting. But even with ODD kids, there’s actually a lot that you can find to laugh about. Again, you don’t want to start laughing at your child—you probably already know that if you laugh at an ODD kid, they’ll usually escalate. You can laugh to yourself, though, when the situation gets ridiculous.

Here’s a good example. One parent we worked with had a 16-year-old boy with ODD. She had to call the police because he’d become violent and broken some things in the house. While talking to the officers on the front porch, the boy actually said, “I want to get emancipated and live on my own, but my mum won’t give me a ride down to the courthouse so I can fill out the paperwork.” (He didn’t have a driver’s license). The mum walked away and chuckled to herself privately.

The point is, sometimes it’s good to just walk away. You may need to go in your own room and laugh quietly to yourself, like this mum did.

**Will we laugh about this later?** Another great question to ask yourself when you’re upset about your child’s behaviour is, “Will this matter in a few months or years?” If the answer is “no,” you can probably let it go after you address the situation with your child. And, while this may not be a laughing matter right now, recognise that it might be funny later on. It’s good if you can say to yourself, “Someday, we’re going to look back on this and laugh.”

We also want to state here that just because you find some humour in the situation doesn’t mean you’re minimising it. It doesn’t mean you’re saying “This is funny so there aren’t going to be any consequences.” You’re still following through as a parent, but you’re also keeping your head above water by allowing humour to give you some perspective.
Use laughter to connect with other parents. If you can find other parents to connect with over your kids’ behaviour, it can be so helpful. It normalises things, releases tension to laugh together, and helps you relate to someone else and find that common ground. When you can empathise with each other and find the humour in your own situation, it lightens the load, even when you’re going through a rough period with your child. In the movie Steel Magnolias, Dolly Parton’s character says it so well: “Laughter through tears is my favourite emotion.”