

Stages of Humor Development

- Stage 1. Children laugh, bodily wiggle, smile in response to tickling and auditory cues that arouse laughter. Laughter occurs in response to tactile stimuli and incongruous actions towards objects. They learn how to elicit positive responses. Toddlers begin to recognize and enjoy the absurd (Infants to 3 years old).
- Stage 2. Children thoroughly enjoy spotting the ridiculous. They make up their own jokes and riddles. Children may find humor in some situations others may find gruesome. They enjoy repetitious rhyming, phonetic patter games, absurd appearances, and mislabeling objects. Humor is found in the forms of silliness, clowning, and teasing. Making faces, dressing differently, odd pictures, and silly sounds are humorous to children (3- and 4-year olds).
- Stage 3. Children begin to see subtle humor that often escapes younger children. Humor is experienced visually, verbally, and mentally. The children recognize incongruities in pictures or cartoons that are grossly dissimilar. Children entertain the idea of two different meanings for the same event. The children often can explain why a joke is funny. At times the children might not be empathic enough to know the effect of their humor. Bathroom words are a big part of humor at this stage. Children will model humor displayed by the adults in their environments (4-, 5-, and 6-year olds).

Adapted from the Introduction to The Power of Laughter by Jackie Silberg published by Gryphon House.