

Innocent Phrases Disguised as Humour: More Harm Than Good?

Student Counselling and Development
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Are you juggling academics, maintaining a social life, sleeping sufficiently, texting everyone back, staying hydrated, doing chores, and cooking? Sound familiar?! Balancing all your tasks as a student can be challenging. You might humorously tell your friends, "I can't deal!" or "I'm so over this!". Tests, assignments, and exams have you thinking: "that's a fail; why even try further!". Ever made a mistake, laughed at yourself and exclaimed, "I'm so useless!". If so, you are not alone.

Humour is essential to life and can help reduce discomfort, lighten your mood, decrease stress, or bring positivity to social conversations. Could there be more to these innocent humoristic phrases than we realise? Let's start at the beginning. Our thoughts precede what we say, and thoughts are powerful. What if I told you that your thoughts influence your emotions and behaviours? What you think can lead to how you feel and behave. Would you be more careful and mindful of your thoughts? It's liberating and empowering to know that your thoughts can guide how you feel and behave. By managing your thoughts more carefully, you have more control over your actions, reactions and emotions.





So, where to start?

- STEP 1** Acknowledge your thoughts and be non-judgemental about them. Thoughts are automatic and will always be there. Accept that the thought is there and that thoughts impact how we feel and behave.
- STEP 2** Be curious about your thoughts. Listen for any negative, demeaning, unhelpful thoughts, phrases or self-talk.
- STEP 3** After isolating a possible unhelpful thought/phrase, ask yourself if this thought is helping or hurting you. Remember that not all thoughts are unhelpful. In what mood is this thought putting you? How does this thought influence your behaviour? These questions will assist you in deciding whether it's helpful or unhelpful thoughts.
- STEP 4** If you identify a thought as unhelpful, ask yourself how you can adapt that thought to be more helpful, tolerant, compassionate or understanding.
- STEP 5** Ask yourself if your adapted thought is more conducive to your mental health and if you can see a difference in your mood or behaviour.

"What you think you become."

Guatama Buddha

Here is an example:

You sit in class and get your test results. It's a fail. Humorously you think to yourself, "just my luck!!" Your thoughts spiral even more. You believe that you're not clever enough and that failing is the end of the world. Before you know it, you feel demotivated and sad, start skipping class and avoid your friends. Instead, say, "this sucks, but I'll survive!" You might feel hopeful and go through your script to learn from your mistakes. Intercept your spiralling thoughts earlier to avoid unhelpful emotions and behaviours.

Humour has numerous benefits and helps us cope. However, be cautious of using humour to disguise unhelpful thoughts. Be self-reflective and sit with your thoughts. You and your thoughts are important, thus, give them the time and nurturing they need.



"Nothing can harm you as much as your own thoughts unguarded."

Gautama Buddha