

LAUGH AWAY TENSION

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

There is nothing like a really good belly laugh to drive away tension. I recall a time when we were going through an extremely stressful situation. It went on and on for months and we thought it would never come to an end. I was so stressed out that the only way I could feel any relief from it was to walk across our fields and sit in peace and quiet for a while, away from the phone and anything else that would remind me of the situation. At that time I used to attend a 'girls nights out' and in the middle of the situation we were in, I really couldn't face going out. However, after a lot of arm-twisting by one of the group, I relented. Let me tell you this. It was the best possible thing I could have done. We started laughing, and honestly I laughed until my sides ached. They say laughter is the best medicine, and it was definitely the best medicine for me right then. It was like taking a heavy coat off and hanging it on a nail for a while to feel free.

We all get stressed at times, and as adults we often bring stress into our homes. After all, home is where 'everything hangs out', right? Wrong! What we need to do is provide a stress-free environment for ourselves, and our children. "Easier said than done", I can hear you say already. OK, let's try a temperature check on your home environment. Is there a positive atmosphere in the home? Is there more laughing than fighting? Do you find yourself saying 'No,' more than 'Yes'? Does anyone notice and praise the good things that are done? Does the whole family do fun things together like going for walks, having picnics, watching or playing sports, going to the movies, or going on excursions together? If you as parents are stressed, do you allow your negative feelings to spill out over the rest of the family, or do you have an effective way of dealing with it? Are you moody? Are your kids moody, disobedient or disrespectful?

A healthy family environment is a hopeful, helpful and happy place to be. How do we make it that way when it isn't? The first thing to change is *you*. Identify the issue and deal with it for the sake of your health and others' peace of mind. There is plenty of free information on the Internet or from counseling centers, so even if you cannot totally eliminate the stress, you can learn how to manage it. Experts say that around 70% of communication in the average home would be deemed negative. Wow! Take time to listen to what is going on in your home. Teach your kids how to appropriately deal with conflict (without fighting). Teach them to say kind and encouraging words to one another instead of being spiteful. Let them see you modeling it, how you want them to act. Make sure you and your kids get plenty of exercise.

It is well documented that laughter and exercise are the best cure. Go out and have fun. You don't have to spend money to have a good time. My kids'

best memories have been when we did simple things together. Life is not a practice run. Enjoy it.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.