

Replenishing Drama and Excitement

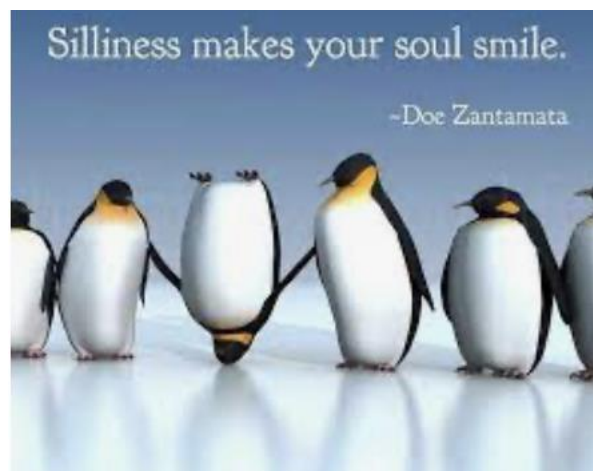
It's not unusual for some of the people we might support to start to become bored of the everyday lifestyles they lead, especially when they have well-trained support workers who reduce and sometimes eliminate harmful risk, drama, and negative stimulation. In many situations, reducing and eliminating stimulus such as this is positive for the person/people regarded, but in some situations, some individuals are adversely affected by the sudden lack of drama, excitement and energy in their lives and they start trying to source it themselves, using their own behaviour.

The purpose of this strategy is to:

'Find ways to provide dramatic energy and increase the excitement and silliness in people's lives who are lacking and missing it.'

Reasons that people might need drama and excitement artificially provided/supplemented include:

- The person might have had a family that included a lot of drama and dramatic situations and this was a very normal existence for them. For this reason, they don't feel safe and are not regulated without this excitement in their lives and they feel quite empty and bored without it.
- Some people crave excessive interoceptive sensory input. This means they love amplified feelings and want to experience things at heightened levels. This would lead the person to want and crave stronger expressions of emotions and more intensive demonstrations of need, want and craving.



- People who are bored. This might sound silly, but many of us need excitement in our lives and crave it. Just as some people don't like excitement and drama, others absolutely love it and need it.
- Some people struggle to communicate their needs and will understand and resonate with expression and tone, rather than words. An example of this might be that someone is very mad at someone and trying to express it, but their expressive communication is not at such a level that the person they are communicating with can understand exactly what they are saying. However, the communication partner is aware that they are mad. If the communication partner also expresses this same angry tone in sympathy and empathy of the person's frustration, then it makes the person experiencing this anger feel validated and heard.
- Some people we work with may have lived a substantial part of their lives in institution-style environments which were large, had many people, lots of noise and lots of drama. Regardless of whether this person liked the noise and drama or not, it's probably familiar to them and makes them feel safe. Often change can be very hard and very de-stabilising. Going from busy, loud, dramatic environments to quiet units with caring, stable workers can be a very difficult transition. In situations such as these, there have been observed issues with some residents, who don't feel settled in the quiet, and don't feel safe without the drama and busy environments around them.
- Further to the above point, some support environments thrive on consistency, stability, empathy, and nurturing. These are great foundations to help a person and necessary as platforms to learn, grow and develop. Sometimes, the one thing missing from some of these environments can be silliness and fun. Sometimes workers focus so hard on being stable and courteous, that they forget that some people also love to laugh, be challenged, do funny and silly things and giggle incessantly about things. The silliness and fun can be a significantly lacking ingredient in the support set up of many clients and the results can lead to depression, boredom, disengagement, and disinterest.

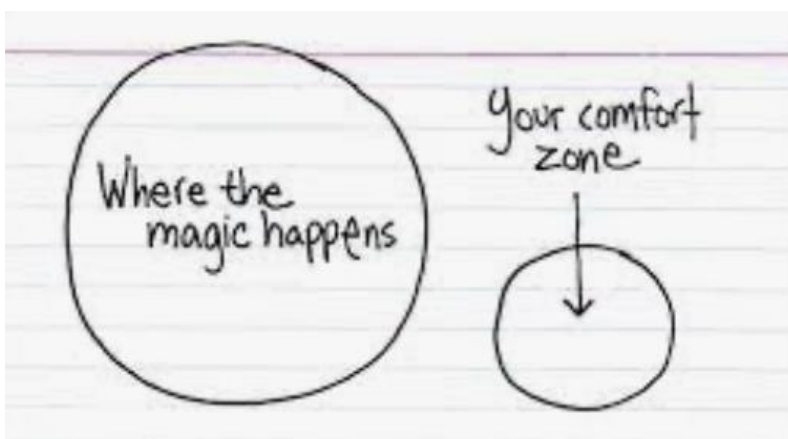
Providing drama and excitement to a person can fulfil the following needs:

- Increase the levels of excitement in the person's day-to-day life.
- Provide some energy to the person and make them feel exhilarated.
- Make them feel like they are back with their family / previous living situation that provided this to them in the past.
- Help them to feel well and regulated.
- Help the person feel like they have been listened to and acknowledged.
- Help the person to express themselves in such a way that makes them feel validated.



What if it feels weird to be silly?

For some people, being dramatic and silly is easy and a part of who we are. For others, it can feel forced, artificial and embarrassing. We will each use a strategy like this uniquely and based on the way we enjoy life and the way we like to be silly. Watch the person you're working with too – have a look and notice what they enjoy and what is fun and silly to them.



It's important to push yourself to see the importance of structured fun and silliness in the lives of those we support. Think about times at home when you are silly and when you laugh and find fun in odd or weird things that others

may think are silly. Also, watch the result of others being silly and having fun and observe how much happier it makes the person you're working with. Naturally, it's only a strategy we would use with those who love it and who get enjoyment from it.

How do you replenish drama and excitement in someone's life?

The key to replenishing drama and excitement is in knowing the person's interests, exaggerating responses, laughing more, showing your feelings with gestures and more words and over-emphasising communication.

Some key tips are:

- Pick stories about movie stars doing scandalous things and use these as subjects to talk to the person you're supporting about.
- Have your own stories about silly things you've done (that you're happy to share) and have a laugh with the person about them.
- When things happen, increase the energy in your response. When you'd normally just say *"Oh no, that's not good."*, instead be more dramatic, include physical gestures and body movements and use your tone of voice to say *"Oh gosh.... Are you kidding? What on earth?? Why did that happen? That's terrible! Oh nooooo."*
- When you're happy, be really happy – do little happy dances, or sing little songs, or make funny hand movements to show you're happy.
- Add some silly phrases or funny sayings to things you do, this will remind you to do / say these funny things every time you complete this task – it could include washing your hands, or cooking food, or helping the person transfer.
- When creating situations of drama, don't use current workers or real people in the person's life. It's best to use movie stars / celebrities etc., or it's likely that the person will project things onto the actual person. E.g., *"I just read that Elton John had an affair – can you believe it?"*



A little bit of
silliness is good
for the soul

What not to do when being silly

Naturally silliness can go too far and be unhelpful when not done with mutual enjoyment, reciprocation and respect. Making fun of people is not OK, using unprofessional language, such as derogatory comments is not OK and making negative comments about other workers is not OK. Silliness should be designed to not hurt anyone and not marginalise people. Some tips to injecting fun, silliness and drama into someone's life in an appropriate way are:

- If you're going to mock someone, only mock yourself. It's the safest way of making sure you never offend anyone. People may invite you to mock them, but it's never a smart thing to do in a workplace. Use yourself as the object of being mocked, this way you can control it.
- Don't volunteer private information about your life that you're not open to being discussed. Have a good think about information that's appropriate to discuss and share and information which should be kept private and/or is sensitive.
- Don't make up lies or go along with lies unless they are ridiculous enough that they are not believable. Example below:

Client: "Julie ate all the food."

Worker: "Oh gosh, all of it? Did Julie eat the food in all these cupboards?? Holy Dooley, Julie must have been hungry this day."

In this example, it's just silliness and unlikely that anyone would believe that Julie actually ate an entire kitchen worth of food.

- If you're unsure if your silliness is appropriate, ask your Team Leader / Coordinator or Specialist Behaviour Practitioner. There is often a fine line between appropriate and not appropriate and this line is often very person and scenario specific.

Help us move the change to non-ABA strategies by adopting brain-based and sensory based integration interventions.

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