

KIDS' COMEDY CORNER

Regardless of the advancements in technology and whatever else has changed for children today, there are some things that remain enshrined in truth. One of these is that a kid telling a joke, however badly delivered it may be, is still the funniest, most heart-warming thing you'll ever see. Most kids don't hold back when they see an opportunity to show their adults just how much personality they have. They will plough enthusiastically into a joke without having any idea how to finish it. Every child has a favourite joke, and the opportunity to tell it is too much to resist. And if any are a little shy, we give them fancy-dress costumes and a New York accent (or as close to one as they can manage) to hide behind while they do it.

The wonderful thing about Kids' Comedy Corner is not to tell great jokes, but just to connect with your kids and with each other. Don't spend a lot of money buying props. You probably have a tatty old sheet about the place and it's amazing what you can find in a thrift store/charity shop for minimal outlay. Letting your kids raid your wardrobe for funny over-sized garments is also an option.

You will need:

Old, plain bedsheet

Pens (to write on fabric and card)

White card for prompt signs and microphone cut-out

Thrift store/charity shop clothes for costumes

Music

Everyone's favourite food

Your phone and charger plus a flat surface or (if you have one) a tripod, for support.

You don't need:

TV

Facebook, Instagram, etc.

To be late

Step 1. Invite the guests: Everybody in the family gets to invite two or three of their best friends over. For the parents, this doesn't necessarily mean your son's best friend's parents, but your actual friends! People you would genuinely choose to spend Friday night with.

Step 2. Find some costumes: go down to your local thrift store/charity shop and buy some potentially comic clothes, such as blazers, trilby hats, ugly ties. Get some glasses and pop the lenses out. Choose clothes that are as ill-fitting and silly-looking as you can and chuck them all in a box.

Step 3. Make the props: you will need a nice, old-fashioned microphone. You can draw a simple outline on a piece of white card and cut it out. Or use a toy microphone, if you have one.

If I were you, I would also make prompt signs as if for a live show:

OH YEAH?

WHO'S THERE?

LOUDER!

APPLAUSE

GO WILD!

And so on. If there's a knock-knock joke, hold up the "who's there?" sign as fast as you can. It's great fun to take turns holding up the signs and even more funny when you get in a muddle trying to find the right one.

Step 4. Choose the music: it's fun to play some music for performers walking off and on. Maybe take it in turns, so that each performer has their own special piece of music, like a boxer coming into the ring!

Step 5. Get in some treats: get in the food you like – pizza, takeaway curry, popcorn by the lorry load, whatever you want to eat. Allow the feeling of a celebration to sneak in, as that's what this is. A celebration of the outrageous good fortune you all have to be in each other's life!

Step 6. Set the scene: Cover up the television, or even better, take it out of the room completely! Where the television goes – which is probably the focal point design-wise of the room – hang a bespoke decorated bed sheet. That sheet is designed and created by the whole family together, even those that can't draw neatly! Mark out the words "Family Comedy Corner" in big letters. You could write the letters and get the kids to colour them in. Draw some pictures if you like. Do it however you want to do it, but it should be nice and homemade and beautifully imperfect. **DO NOT PRINT IT FROM THE COMPUTER!**

Step 7. Now have some fun...: one by one, you take it in turns to swagger up, cool as a cucumber. In that comedy New York draw you say the following script ...

Comedian: "My name is ___ and I gotta joke to tell!"

Audience: "Oh yeah?"

Comedian: "Yeah and it goes like this ... [then tells joke in New York accent]."



Mums and dads, whatever you do, you are not allowed to not take part. Everybody takes their turn. Watch their faces when you walk up with a funny costume on, talking in a ridiculous accent. Play is not a spectator sport so don't spectate, really engage.

Step 8. Capture it on your phone: now here's the treasure for afterwards. Make sure it's all recorded. Don't hold your phone up; put it on a flat surface, a tripod or some other support and leave it to record the whole thing. Put your phone on the charger to make sure the batteries don't run out, check the memory so there's space. The next time that you're driving home from work or you're getting the train, and you've got that feeling of a dark cloud tied to your hat, stop before you get home. Open up that video and watch it; and there you're going to see your boyfriend/wife/daughter/son/mother – whoever it is. You're going to see them grinning, red and embarrassed, telling a funny joke; and if that doesn't make you realize the reason you went to work in the first place, and how incredible the people waiting for you at home are, then nothing will.

DON'T-LOOK-DOWN SPEED DRAWING

Don't-look-down speed drawing is fun, fast and a great way to connect with people. If, for instance, your kids have been arguing or are in a particularly volatile mood, this can be a quite fun way to take them out of that headspace and push them into an on-the-spot art experience. It requires them to be completely in the moment, and quite often they will then simply forget what they were angry about in the first place.

Likewise, if you are running a session with a group, this exercise can create an unusual and eccentric punctuation point at which to break up the session and change the direction of the energy.

You will need:

Two or more people to partner up (although you can form groups of three)

Pen and paper

The idea is to draw a non-stop portrait without removing your pen from the paper. However, the added twist is that you're not allowed to look down. Keep staring into the face of your partner and attempt to draw the best picture you can of them without glancing down at the paper.

There are at least two reasons why this is funny: the first is because the picture you end up with can sometimes make Picasso look like a square; the second is the unusually bizarre, intense stare on your face when you're looking at someone and concentrating on something else. Either way, you'll end up with some pretty ludicrous pictures which, when framed on the wall of your classroom or the stairs of your home, will never fail to raise a giggle.



GAME 3: WONKY WARDROBE CHALLENGE

This is essentially a high-speed, dress-up challenge – but it's wonky because the clothing you put on shouldn't be of the right size, as this just adds to the fun.

You will need:

Two players (or equal teams)

Enough room for the players to fling clothes around (so no ornaments nearby)

A huge pile of clothing (enough for the players to be swamped in clothes) of various sizes, shapes and colours, including tops, bottoms – trousers and skirts, gloves, socks and headgear

A whistle/bell/air horn/starter gun!

Measure out the clothing into equal piles. Next, blow the whistle. At this point, there are two different ways you can play the game.

1. The two players have less than a minute to put on as many items of clothing as possible. The player wearing the most at the end of the allotted time wins that round.
2. The first person to put on all of the clothing in front of them wins.

It doesn't really matter which one of these ways you choose as they're both lots of fun. I recommend having a quick picture-pose session at the end of each round, as the absolute ridiculousness of the final product of the Wonky Wardrobe Challenge is something you probably want to frame and stick on the classroom wall or up in the hallway.



CREATIVE CAR RIDES:

HIDE THE SHOE

Whether we like it or not, most of us will inevitably end up spending a large amount of time stuck in the car as a family, either going to Grandma's house, during the school run or setting out on holiday. So here's a quick game to make the journey more interesting. In this game, the person whose turn it is gets to "hide the shoe" anywhere in history – past, present or future – and within fact or fiction, or somewhere totally abstract. They say, "I've hidden the shoe", while clearly picturing where that shoe is. Then everyone else in the car has to ask them questions with a "yes" or "no" answer. Sometimes it can be easy to find the shoe: it might be hidden, for instance, in the washing machine at Granny's house, or in Mum's wardrobe. But the more you play, the more outrageous and peculiar it can get. For example, one of my friends adopted this game for their car journeys, and their little boy Henry hid the shoe between the number 1 and the 3 in the number 13. Another time the shoe was hidden on Gandalf's foot as he said, "You shall not pass!" in *The Lord of the Rings* movie. So you see, this game bends time, space, reality – and everything else besides.

NATURALLY PLAYFULL

The power of Real Play is that everybody can take part – and in fact I believe deep down in my bones that the truest human state is a playful one. From romance to family life, in work and in study, I think one of the most genuine ways of being ourselves is through play, and rather than being something we have to learn, it is more an instinct we need to remember. Now let's go forth and laugh together... And that's an order!