

Just joking? But not all jokes are fun for all

Learn to tell the difference between healthy and unhealthy humour.

When you crack a joke and everyone laughs, don't you feel good? Happy laughter adds joy to our world. What would life be without comedians and clowns? On the other hand, some types of jokes can hurt people badly.

Unhealthy humour

You may think that if it makes people laugh, it must be a good joke. It is not that simple though. People may laugh even when they are unhappy. Laughter can hide our real feelings of being hurt, embarrassed or ashamed. And, some jokes are funny but not good for our well-being. So, we should be asking whether the humour is healthy or not.

Humour that insults or "puts down" innocent people is unhealthy. Unfortunately, comedians use put-downs a lot. Many of their jokes are about, for instance, being clumsy, short or fat. They also make fun of people's ignorance and mistakes. Listeners are expected to be good sports and laugh along. But, is everyone really happy?

Even if the comedian does not mention any names or point at anyone, a joke about fat people could make an obese person in the room feel

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Use humour wisely.** Don't crack jokes that hurt anyone, not even yourself. Avoid being sarcastic.
- **Don't laugh at mean jokes.** Without even saying a word, you can discourage unhealthy humour by simply not laughing.
- **Express your feelings.** When someone teases you unkindly, you have the right to ask them to stop. Be polite but firm. If you find it too hard to do at first, practice with a good friend until you feel more confident.

day that they are going to be **mocked**, humiliated or shamed, then they will not feel safe. Every student has a right to feel safe at school.

Although we know mean jokes hurt kids, they are hard to stop. One reason is that there are no written rules against them. It is different if Andrew punches Zak. Andrew will get punished.

In contrast, when Renny constantly laughs at Kate, the teacher may not even know it is happening. Renny might get away with her behaviour even though she is hurting Kate as much as Andrew hurts Zak.

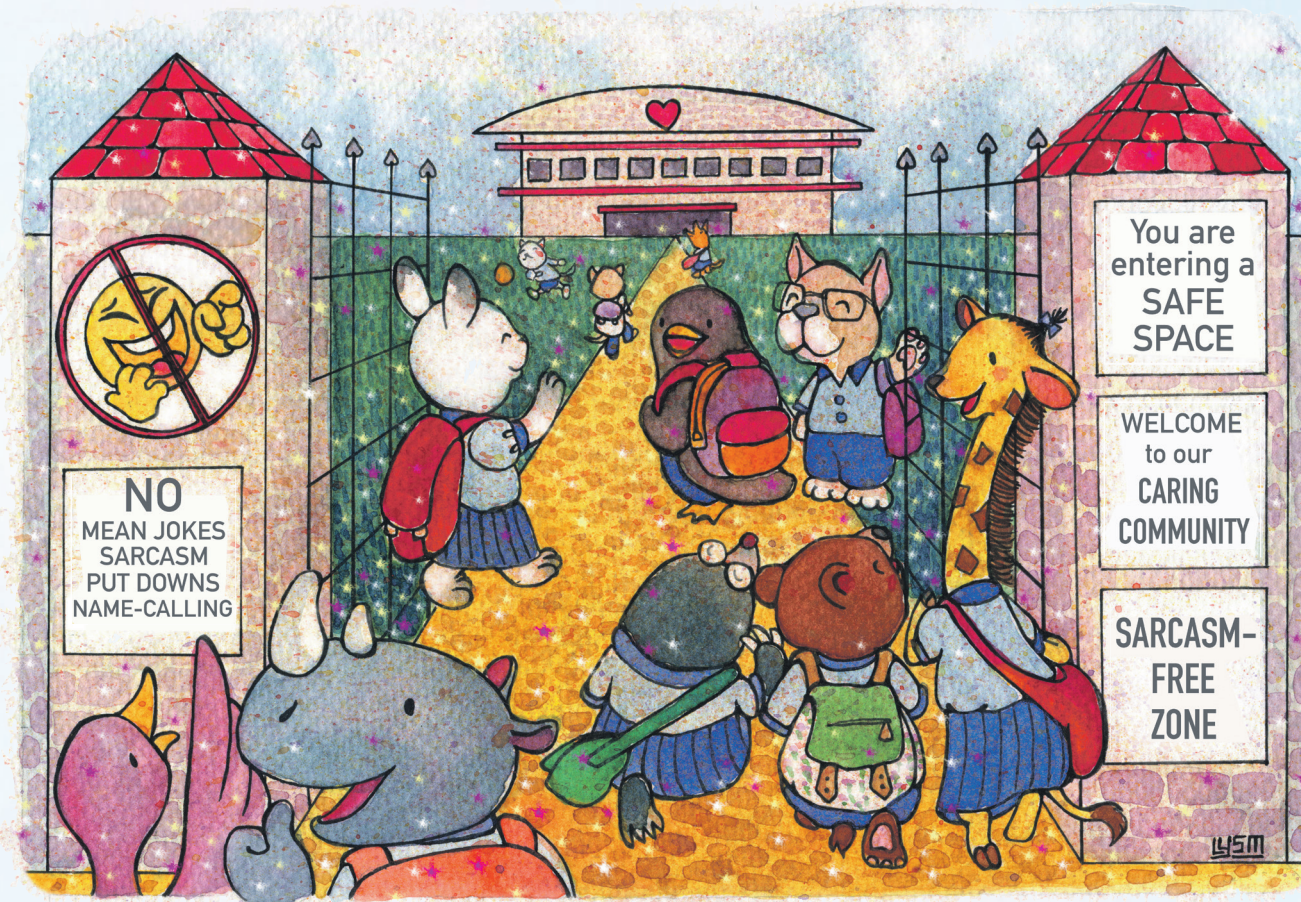
Racial jokes

When mean jokes are about how people look, their accents, the places they come from or any of their other ethnic qualities, then there is racial discrimination.

It can be very painful for a dark-skinned child to be teased about her skin colour, or for a foreign student to overhear someone imitate his accent.

Racial jokes hurt minority students the most because there may be very few of them — sometimes only one or two — in a typical classroom. When there are very few members of any ethnic group in a class, they may feel more helpless and less confident about standing up for themselves.

— By MARY GEORGE



embarrassed. And, if it happens often enough, that person's self-esteem gets lowered. That is why such humour is unhealthy. Unhealthy humour can enter your classroom quite easily.

In your classroom

Because feelings get hurt, unhealthy humour is bad for your classroom

community. But, if professional comedians can use put-downs all the time, why can't you?

The difference is that people can walk out of the comedy show at any point. School is not like that. When someone laughs at a student, the student can't simply leave — he would miss classes and that's not fair to him. Also, if students need to worry every

Dr Seuss chose humour

Dr Seuss's whacky storybooks make us laugh. Yet, as a child in the United States, Theodor Seuss Geisel (his real name) did not have a happy time in school. The other kids were mean to him because he was German. World War 1 was going on, and Germany was an enemy country.

Instead of taking revenge, young Theodor cracked jokes and drew funny cartoons to become more popular. It seems to have worked — he continued to cartoon, and later wrote and illustrated the storybooks

that we love. Perhaps because he had been personally hurt by racial discrimination, Dr Seuss was always kind and respectful to children.

VOCAB BUILDER

mocked (say "mok'd"; verb) = teased or laughed at in a mean way.

solemn (say "sol-um"; adjective) = serious and unsmiling.

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Clown doctors

Patch Adams was bullied so badly in school that he became depressed. Even as an adult, he had depression and was hospitalised three times in just one year. That was when he decided to do something good with his life. So, he joined medical school.

In those days, doctors were very **solemn** with patients. But, as a medical student, Mr Adams felt that hospitals — especially children's wards —

should be happier places. He put on a red, rubber nose and made the patients laugh, thus becoming the world's first clown doctor.

Inspired by Dr Adams, there are now professional clown doctors all over the world. In 2014, Clown Doctors Singapore became the first association of its kind in Asia. As you might guess, clown doctors are therapists with special training. They learn how to use humour to help sick people feel better. A good clown doctor never puts down anyone in any way.