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## When life is falling apart but your funny bone is fine: Therapeutic humor, resilience and care-giving

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**Statement of the Problem:** The experience of parenting a disabled or chronically ill child brings with it a host of physical, psychological, social and spiritual challenges which test the resilience of the strongest of caregiver-parents. Exhaustion, grief, questioning and isolation can quickly impact all spheres of life; the parent-child relationship, the family system and the individual's self-concept if left unchecked. While institutional supports (e.g. case management, teaching, support groups, homecare, and financial programs) are essential in the accompaniment of families, the development of internal strategies for resilience is vital to the healthy coping of caregivers.

**Methodology & Theoretical Orientation:** Therapeutic humor is any intervention that promotes health and wellness by stimulating a playful discovery, expression or appreciation of the absurdity or incongruity of life's situations. This intervention may enhance health or be used as a complimentary treatment of illness to facilitate healing or coping, whether emotional, cognitive, social or spiritual (AATH 2000). Humor can be a powerful method of gaining perspective and temporary emotional reprieve during difficult life experiences. For parents of a disabled or chronically ill child, humor can help momentarily detach from the heaviness of care, to connect with healthcare professionals and to normalize the absurd in a way that can validate the individual, promote their social participation and reinforce the positive elements of their parent-child relationship as well as those with other family members. The creation, expression and/or appreciation of humor anchors both caregiver and healthcare practitioner to their humanness.

**Conclusion & Significance:** Drawing on case studies, humor theory and her own experience parenting a child with disabilities, this presentation serves to highlight the application of humor as a valuable tool to boost resilience in caregiver-parents and to elaborate how healthcare providers can effectively promote and use humor to facilitate caregiver coping and collaboration in care.

### Biography

Maia Aziz is a Professional Social Worker (PSW) with over 20 years' experience in child protection, pediatric rehabilitation and currently serving as Assistant Administrative Chief of Allied Health Services at The Montreal Children's Hospital in Montreal, Canada. As an active member of the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor and Certified Humor Professional (CHP), she is a contributing writer to The Positive Psychology People.

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