

From the Heart...

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



The First Step to Stress Removing Fun

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Oct 3, 2014)

Life often throws us a curve now and again that takes the fun out of having fun. What raises your blood pressure and steals the fun out of your day? Could it simply result from a traffic jam that you have to plod your way through for an hour? Could it be when you got home from grocery shopping, some items were missing you paid for? Or maybe life has thrown you a major curve that currently doesn't show you a way around or through?

So, the stress mounts until you can't see yourself having fun at all. For all that is going on around us in the nation and world, who can really have any fun?! We start to put the whole world on our shoulders and crusade through every injustice, trying to make right what is wrong. We actually wear out and end up incessantly complaining with just about anything. It doesn't matter how small or big the inconvenience or trauma may be at home or across the nation. A life of stress begins to take over not only robbing you of fun but of any hope at all. This is where so many fall into any variety of addictive, compulsive behaviors that only make life more complicated.

Sounds really depressing even exhausting, right? And for those loyal readers who thought "Sharon always makes me feel better," I hope I haven't burst your

optimistic bubble or lost you as a reader at this point. Please stay with me a little longer. I will try my best to dig us out of this “stressful” hole.

But first, we all know this scenario plays out in so many lives today of those close to us who face financial, health, relationship problems or crises. You name it. Yet, we all know we must choose our battles and those worth fighting for. Then let the other battles be picked up by those better suited to step in and win. How can we discern the difference? There is a way to remove the stress so fun can be found.

Here are a few possibilities to begin with that works for me in order to balance my life between letting go and continuing to stand in the gap.

- **No matter how hard it may be, give yourself a break.** Do this first. Find a healthy outlet on a regular basis. . . an uplifting movie, music, movement.
- **Focus on outlets for your body, soul, and spirit.** . . exercise until your mind and emotions settle down; laughter for the soul has amazing results; life affirming prayers work wonders.
- **Talk with someone you trust.** . . hopefully that person will be a caring, skilled listener, who will help you see the big picture and help you voice the blessings that are in your life. Often times we see the problem as greater than it really is, overwhelming any blessings and thoughts of hope that were there. And by all means ask for a hug or two, or three.
- **Give yourself time.** . . It is amazing what another day can bring to light if we are willing to hold off making any hasty decisions or actions until we know that we know some action is needed. Hasty actions are more likely

fueled by feelings or emotions, particularly fear and pride, that drive us to do things we later regret. Keep in mind that action can include letting it all go or gaining the strength and clear purpose to face it head on. When you give yourself time, every morning is a new morning of possibilities.

- **Keep your negative talk and rehearsing to a minimum.** . . . We all have this temptation. The problem is rehearsing over and over doesn't really solve anything. Rehearsing actually re-traumatizing your body, over and over again. Your body thinks it's happening again.

I came across a blog article by Steve Wiens (<http://www.stevewiens.com/>) who so accurately described him winning over rehearsing. He offered that we end up actually imagining the worst about ourselves and others. Our minds trick us by assuming that all of the thinking, processing, and rehearsing was actually doing something to solve the problem. Yes, it is valuable to think about the what, why, how, when, who things. However, most of us dive all the way into our problems and get trapped inside what Wiens calls "a cage of shame."

The SOLUTION is basically simple but not always easy. When you start imagining the worst, stop. Say to yourself, "What I'm thinking is possible, but I'm not going to camp there. I'm leaving this cage." Say it out loud. It may feel strange at first. Then imagine some different more positive outcomes & meanings to whatever you are struggling to move through.

Being a faith person and Christian, it is called "renewing the mind" where a verse stands out as a personal promise to stand on and believe. But I also know that we often

times can't know how long or the circumstance under which that promise comes true. That's the challenge of trusting, hoping, and finding fun in life in the meantime. And as Dr. Brené Brown, author of *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*, often quotes Theodore Roosevelt . . .

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; . . . who at best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly."

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From the Heart...

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Simple Ways to Have Fun

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Oct 10, 2014)

How do you play? There is a big wide world of choices based on your core values, social interaction, and just plain fun—at home, in your community, state, and across the nation. Here's your opportunity to think of ways to have fun each day with this acronym, SIMPLE FUN. With each letter, what can you add to this list of interesting possibilities?

Snorkeling, soccer, scavenger hunt, snoozing, slumber, smiling, storytelling

Invent, inspire, imagine, incline on a sofa, involve a friend, innovate

Movie time, music, muse, motivate someone, magic games, musical chairs,
massage

Playing with young ones, pretend, paint together, pancakes, pebble collecting

Laughter for the body and soul, lounging, leaf collecting, lemonade, limber up,
learn

Encourage, empower, ease up, energize, exercise, escort a friend to a fun event

Friendship, fond memories, face paint, finish a project, fishing, folk dancing,
facial

Understand, upgrade your dream list

Nice thoughts and words, nebula sky gazing, noble deeds

Any of these simple ways and attitudes to elicit fun times can definitely ease the daily stresses in life. Yet, if I were to put one at the top of the list it would be laughter. Sheri & Bob Stritof, author of *The Everything Great Marriage Book*, believe that one of the great joys in marriage is when couples spend time laughing together and enjoying each other's sense of humor. Here are some benefits of laughter and humor they believe we can experience, including ways to increase laughter in your marriage.

- Laughter is a marvelous gift for enhancing your day and reducing stress and tension.
- Laughter lifts the spirit and brings couples closer together.
- Having a sense of humor as a couple can help keep your relationship fresh.
- Be aware of the humorous moments in each day.
- Make it a habit for everyone in your family to share at dinner something funny that happened to them.
- Take delight in comedies on television and at the movies.
- Watch classic funny movies and television shows.

When we can laugh together and at ourselves, we open wide the gates for so many surprises that will delight our days and lives. What on the list gets your attention? Then

give it a try. You just may find yourself smiling, thanking others, and hugging more often. Those around you just might join in on the fun.

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Where our nation spend their R&R

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Oct 17, 2014)

As leisure time and personal incomes have grown across the Nation, so has the arts, entertainment, and recreation industry. This industry includes about 115,000 establishments, ranging from art museums to fitness centers. Practically any activity that occupies a person's leisure time, excluding the viewing of motion pictures and video rentals, is part of the arts, entertainment, and recreation industry.

The diverse range of activities offered by this industry can be categorized into three broad groups—

- ***Live performances or events***
- ***Historical, cultural, or educational exhibits***
- ***Recreation or leisure-time activities.***

So says the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Yet, I wouldn't leave out going to the movies and video rentals, one of our nation's most active pastimes. In 2009, Americans spent over **\$188 billion on arts, entertainment, and recreation**. Where most of the dollars went are as follows (Table 9.1. Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation Services; NAICS 71 – Estimated Revenue for Employer Firms: 2001 Through 2009):

31%	Other amusement—golf, skiing, marinas, fitness/recreation sports, bowling, others
13%	Gambling (including casinos, racetrack casinos)
17%	Spectator sports
8%	Performing arts
9%	Promoters of performing arts/sports/similar events
6%	Amusement
7%	Independent artists, writers, performers
6%	Museums, historical sites, and similar institutions
2.5%	Agents and managers of artists, athletes, entertainers, other public figures

Where do you spend most of your R&R time? If it's gambling, I would encourage you to reconsider how you spend your time and money. Gambling can be a very slippery slope for the money that will go into someone's else currency coffer. You also may find you lose more than money, such as those relationships you hold near and dear.

I encourage you to check out local and regional performing arts, museums, and historical sites to help advance your community's quality of life. There's a whole world of fun things, even beyond the sports you love. Broaden your cultural horizons right here at home for both you and your family.

If the tickets aren't already sold out, be sure to reserve some seats at the Boerne Performing Arts Voca People Concert October 23 plus their 2015 Series

(www.boerneperformingarts.com). And definitely become a patron donor of the Hill

Country Council for the Arts (www.hccarts.org). HCCArts' United We Art" mission is to develop and sustain an environment that supports and promotes awareness, appreciation, education and access to all the Arts in Kendall County and the Texas Hill Country. Enjoy all the great fun things to do right in your own backyard in the Texas Hill Country!

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Wreck-Proof Your Recreation, part 1

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Oct 24 2014)

What are appropriate recreation and entertainment activities? This might be a somewhat loaded question here, since we all have different ideas on “what is appropriate.” So, first think about what you believe to be healthy, appropriate recreation and entertainment activities. Then ask yourself “What activities do I consider unhealthy or inappropriate for both adults and children?”

Since practically any activity that occupies a person’s leisure time could be part of the arts, entertainment, and recreation, how do we distinguish between the good and not so good? Again, one key criterion is your core values.

Where do those values for yourself and family fit into the choices you make for entertainment and recreation? Your core values should be the deciding factor as to whether you go to a particular movie, view an art show, or what you leave sitting around in your home and on your computer.

So, review your core values, dreams & goals. Then see how your recreation & entertainment choices line up. If you get some kind of internal check, search out what that’s all about. Maybe, you are trying to tell yourself to not entertain that type of entertainment.

Of course, most psychologists and public health experts advise to stay away from any aggressive and graphic violent videos, movies, and any pornography, not only for children but also adults. What are the consequences of inappropriate choices?

Yes, video games can be fun and entertaining but not at the expense of sacrificing your core values and risking your child's own wholesome development. As one example, we have all heard the growing evidence over the years that points to a link between violent videos and aggressive behavior in children. A number of states today, such as Illinois, Michigan, and California, have all passed state laws to prohibit the sale of violent video games to minors.

National Institute on Media and the Family released its 13th annual Video and Computer Game scorecard (2008), which revealed there is a major gap between parents' awareness of the time their kids spend with video games, as well as the content. Their national survey translated into 59 million young players. "The overwhelming majority of these kids play their video games, do their homework, keep up their responsibilities, and have other interests. No problem. So it's clear that video and computer games are not inherently bad for kids. Some kids, however, get hooked. Computer game addiction is real and growing. Our research shows that almost one out of seven game players shows signs of an addiction."

In addition, the scorecard linking violent media with attitudes and behavior resulted in overwhelming evidence that screen violence has an effect on the kids watching it. "Not all kids mimic what they see. Yet, the . . . more pervasive effect of violent media is not so much violent behavior, but rather the culture of disrespect it creates and nourishes."

A large amount of media use, including video games has also been linked to sedentary lifestyles by a number of studies, contributing to the obesity problem in our nation. Yet, there is no reason kids can't play games, eat healthy foods, and get enough exercise. The major factors are The Big Three: Too Much Time, The Wrong Content, Sedentary Lifestyles. Helping your child develop a healthy and balanced life depends on you as their parent. I believe this also translates for adults as well with a number of unhealthy activities, including these three major ones.

Inappropriate recreation and entertainment can result in emptiness, self-deceit, infidelity to one's core values, faith, family, and reckless behavior. The perceived fun only leaves you with fractured relationships and futility! Now that you've heard the bad news, in the next article let's focus on the good news for healthy, appropriate recreation and entertainment activities.

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From the Heart...

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Wreck-Proof Your Recreation, part 2

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Oct 31, 2014)

In the previous article, you were asked “What activities do you consider unhealthy or inappropriate for both adults and children?” Since practically any activity that occupies a person’s leisure time could be part of the arts, entertainment, and recreation, how do we distinguish between the good and not so good? Again, one key criterion is your core values.

Psychologists and public health experts advise us to stay away from any aggressive and graphic violent videos, movies, and any pornography, not only for children but also adults. Some of the consequences of inappropriate choices include not so much violent behavior, but rather the culture of disrespect it creates and nourishes. Large amounts of media use, including video games, has also been linked to sedentary lifestyles contributing to the obesity problem in our nation. The major factors are The Big Three: Too Much Time, The Wrong Content, Sedentary Lifestyles. Inappropriate recreation and entertainment can result in emptiness, self-deceit, infidelity to one’s core values, faith, family, and reckless behavior.

Now that you have heard the bad news, let’s focus on the good news for healthy, appropriate recreation and entertainment activities. What are the benefits of appropriate R/E activities? Here are a few key benefits:

- Appropriate recreation relaxes and restores one's body, soul and spirit.
- Appropriate recreation brings contentment.
- Appropriate entertainment provides for an enjoyable occasion.
- Appropriate entertainment helps you celebrate life and affirm relationships.

You decide—what do you see as benefits for yourself and family? What kinds of recreation and entertainment do you frequent? Here are some possibilities to consider.

AT HOME—

- Arts/Crafts, Sewing, Knitting or Needlework
- Computers & Software for home use—including computer games, internet
- Do Absolutely Nothing!
- Music Audio/Videos, Stereo Systems, Musical Instruments
- Play w/ Pets—cats, dogs, fish, reptiles, birds, hamsters, you name it!
- Read Books, Magazines & Newsletters
- Singing, Dancing, Storytelling
- Playing w/ Toys, Balls, Games and Dolls—including riddle making, puzzles, interactive game boards, magic games, juggling, mime, skipping rope, whipped tops and hoops
- TV Program Viewing—daytime, prime time, soaps, dramas, documentary, how-to programs; TV—VCR/DVD movies & prerecorded videos

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD/COMMUNITY—Fun Is Just Around the Corner!—

- Concerts
- Dining out
- Lectures/Speaking Engagements

- Local Amusement Parks
- Movie Theatre, Live Theatre
- Museums & Galleries
- Neighborhood Park activities
- Shops of every variety
- Sports, Exercise—golf, tennis, soccer, basketball, baseball, water sports/kayaking, walking, hiking, running, fitness training, you name it!
Some people actually love exercise!
- Touring, Sightseeing, Historical Sights, Lounging, Resort Accommodations

IN THE STATE & NATION—Fun is Just Down Our Nation’s Highways!—

- Dude Ranch/horseback Riders
- Hunting
- Lounging, Resort Accommodations
- Parks of all types—Amusement, State, National, Private
- R&R resorts
- Touring, Sightseeing, Historical Sights
- Wildlife adventures

IN THE WORLD—Start Dream Traveling the US & the World!—

- ***For the Roughing It Crowd*** = Camping, Climbing, Fishing & Fish Hatcheries, Hiking/Biking Trails, Horseback Riding, Hostels, Hunting National & World Parks, Off-Highway Vehicle Traveling Water Sports, Wildlife Viewing, Winter Sports

- ***For the Tourist in general*** = Auto Touring, Boating, Educational Programs, Historic/Cultural Sites, Lodging, Museum/Visitors Centers, RVing the countryside

Whatever you and your family do for recreation and entertainment, always insure your core values are supported. And always have fun making memories together.

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