

Teasing is good for you!

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The use of insults at a young age improves social skills and helps children develop a sense of humour according to research by Dr Erin Heerey of the School of Psychology.

Her research also found that "play fighting" gives pupils the chance to tell the difference between real and pretend violence and she insists that teasing and nicknames were an "essential part of life" and should not automatically be confused with bullying. Teasing helps children to discover how to use their bodies, voices and faces to communicate nuances of meaning, she added.

Dr Heerey said: "I think it takes a while for kids to gain proficiency. You can watch teenagers queuing up to buy a movie ticket and they banter with one another. They say really horrible things to one but they are all laughing and it's all fun."

Dr Heerey carried out recent research into the role that teasing plays in US college fraternities. It found older students mocked newcomers with crude nicknames about drunkenness and other failings in a way that encouraged them to change their behaviour and helped group bonding. The study - with Dacher Keltner of California University - found that these "playful humiliations" led to people becoming better friends. When the researchers revisited the group two years later, students who had been the butt of jokes were in leadership positions and playing the same role of passing on social norms.

Dr Heerey, originally from Wisconsin, said British people seemed more

serious with their teasing than Americans. She said: "People will say something outlandish with a totally straight face. But people in Britain poke fun at themselves a little bit more than Americans. "As an American, you're expecting to see these non-verbal cues that say 'I'm joking' but you don't see them - but they are there and you just have to look a little closer."

Provided by Bangor University

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