

How 'dad jokes' may prepare your kids for a lifetime of embarrassment, according to psychology

September 1 2023, by Shane Rogers and Marc Hye-Knudsen



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This Father's Day you may be rolling out your best "[dad jokes](#)" and watching your children laugh (or groan). Maybe you'll hear your own father, partner or friend crack a dad joke or two. You know the ones:

"What is the most condescending animal? A pan-DUH!"

"Why don't scientists trust atoms? Because they make up everything!"

Yes, dad jokes can be fun. They play an important role in how we interact with our kids. But dad jokes may also help prepare them to handle embarrassment later in life.

What are dad jokes?

Dad jokes are a distinct style of humor consisting of puns that are simple, wholesome and often involve a cheesy delivery.

These jokes usually feature obvious wordplay and a straightforward punchline that leaves listeners either chuckling or emitting an exaggerated groan.

This corny brand of humor is popular. There are hundreds of [websites](#), [YouTube videos](#) and [TikToks](#) dedicated to them. You can even play around with [dad joke generators](#) if you need some inspiration.

Why are dad jokes so popular?

People seem to love dad jokes, partly because of the puns.

A [study](#) published earlier this year found people enjoy puns more than most other types of jokes. The authors also suggested that if you groan in response to a pun, this can be a sign you enjoy the [joke](#), rather than find

it displeasing.

Other research shows dad jokes work on at least [three levels](#):

1. As tame puns

Humor typically [violates](#) a kind of boundary. At the most basic level, dad jokes only violate [a language norm](#). They require specific knowledge of the language to "get" them, in a way a fart joke does not.

The fact that dad jokes are wholesome and inoffensive means dads can tell them around their [children](#). But this also potentially makes them tame, which other people might call unfunny.

2. As anti-humor

Telling someone a pun that's too tame to deserve being told out loud is itself a violation of the norms of joke-telling. That violation can in turn make a dad joke funny. In other words, a dad joke can be so unfunny this makes it funny—a type of [anti-humor](#).

3. As weaponized anti-humor

Sometimes, the purpose of a dad joke is not to make people laugh but to make them groan and roll their eyes. When people tell dad jokes to [teasingly](#) annoy someone else for fun, dad jokes work as a kind of [weaponised](#) anti-humor.

The stereotypical scenario associated with dad jokes is exactly this: a dad telling a pun and then his kids rolling their eyes out of annoyance or cringing from embarrassment.

Dad jokes help dads be dads

Dad jokes are part of a father's toolkit for engaging with his loved ones, a way to connect through laughter. But as children grow older, the way they receive puns change.

[Children](#) at around six years old enjoy hearing and telling puns. These are generally innocent ones such as:

"Why is six afraid of seven? Because seven ate nine!"

As children age and their language and reasoning abilities develop, their understanding of humor becomes more complex.

In adolescence, they may start to view puns as unfunny. This, however, doesn't stop their fathers from telling them.

Instead, fathers can revel in the embarrassment their dad jokes can produce around their image-conscious and [sensitive](#) adolescent children.

In fact, in a study, one of us (Marc) [suggests](#) the playful teasing that comes with dad jokes may be partly why they are such a widespread cultural phenomenon.

This playful and safe teasing serves a dual role in father-child bonding in adolescence. Not only is it playful and fun, it can also be used to help [educate](#) the young person how to handle feeling embarrassed.

Helping children learn how to deal with embarrassment is no laughing matter. Getting better at this is a very important part of learning how to [regulate emotions](#) and develop [resilience](#).

Modeling the use of humor also has benefits. Jokes can be a useful

[coping strategy](#) during [awkward situations](#)—for instance, after someone says [something awkward](#) or to make someone laugh who has [become upset](#).

Dad jokes are more than punchlines

So, the next time you hear your father unleash a cringe-worthy dad joke, remember it's not just about the punchline. It's about creating connections and lightening the mood.

So go ahead, let out that groan, and share a smile with the one who proudly delivers the dad jokes. It's all part of the fun.

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