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[00:00:13] **Christina Rouse:** Welcome to the SRCAC Exchange, a podcast series for child abuse professionals who are looking to exchange innovative ideas and gain inspiration within the system.

[00:00:25] **Christina Rouse:** I'm your host, Christina Rouse, Program Manager for CAC Development with SRCAC. This season, we'll be focusing on the invisible threads that sustain the dedicated professionals in Children's Advocacy Centers. Our guests will partake in dynamic discussions around supportive workplace cultures, The importance of MDT relationships, what we are telling ourselves about our work, and so many other topics that will ignite passion.

[00:00:53] **Christina Rouse:** So whether you are a seasoned CAC professional or just starting out in your career, join us as we delve [00:01:00] into this critical topic. We all know that laughter can be the best medicine, but what happens when that laughter comes from a dark place? In this episode, we're diving into a topic that's rarely discussed, but likely familiar to you.

[00:01:17] **Christina Rouse:** How child abuse professionals use dark humor to manage the emotional toll of their work. How does it help professionals stay grounded in such a challenging field and when might it cross the line? Learn more at [www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org) Let's explore the delicate balance on how laughter can be both a lifeline and a liability.

[00:01:38] **Christina Rouse:** It's only fitting that we have a neurohumorist joining our conversation today. Karyn Buxman is an international speaker, successful author, and neurohumorist living at the intersection of the brain and humor. Karyn is a proud recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor and serves on [00:02:00] the advisory boards of the Invisible Disabilities Association.

[00:02:04] **Christina Rouse:** And the American Happiness Association. I'm honored to have Karyn with me to share her expert perspective on this topic and how it relates to our work. All right, Karyn, I think it's safe to say that you are our very first neuro humorist on our show. And I just know that you're going to help us learn so much about the power of humor and I'm very excited that you're here.

[00:02:33] **Karyn Buxman:** Thank you. Thank you. I love being your favorite neuro humorist, even though I am your only neuro humorist. It counts. It counts. We're going to count that.

[00:02:43] **Christina Rouse:** Yeah. Let's kick us off by just talking about the science behind humor and what humor does when we use it in our brains.

[00:02:53] **Karyn Buxman:** Yes. Cause I love living at the intersection of humor in the brain and people are like, what the heck is a neuro [00:03:00] humorist?

[00:03:00] **Karyn Buxman:** Or maybe they're saying, oh, come on. Chris, how many neurohumors do you have? Living at the intersection of humor and the brain has been so insightful into the behavior of people. Let me just start by saying, what do you think the purpose of the brain is? It

[00:03:15] **Christina Rouse:** kind

[00:03:16] **Karyn Buxman:** of helps us navigate how we operate in the world.

[00:03:20] **Karyn Buxman:** It does. It helps us navigate. That's a great answer. And it's number one purpose is to keep us alive. So the brain is constantly searching for threat and it's looking for what could physically harm us, what could emotionally harm us, and when our brain feels like it is in threat. But those kinds of things cause us to release this cascade of neurotransmitters that feed us with adrenaline and epinephrine, norepinephrine, if it's an extended period of time, cortisol, which [00:04:00] causes just this overall response.

[00:04:03] **Karyn Buxman:** Throughout our body, every single body system is affected. And so the stress response in the case here with people who are caring for children and the rights of children and wanting them to be treated fairly and wanting to have that certainty that things are going to be okay. And all of these things, if you kind of think about it one by one, come into play.

[00:04:30] **Karyn Buxman:** The great news is that we also know that humor can offset those various responses of the brain. It helps us physiologically, every single body system that is negatively affected by stress can be positively affected by humor. It helps us cognitively because that brain break. It halts the amygdala hijack.

[00:04:59] **Karyn Buxman:** Even if it's [00:05:00] just momentary, it halts the amygdala hijack and we regain access. We regain that lost cognitive capacity. We have the ability to clarify our thinking. It helps us emotionally, psychologically, socially. We can't hold two emotions at the same time. And when we are in a state of humor and fun and play, if you think of emotions in terms of energy or vibration, if that's not too woo woo for people, I do live in California after all.

[00:05:32] **Karyn Buxman:** But when you think of it, depression, sadness, anger, frustration, all of that, it feels heavier and as we want to move up and feel lighter. Humor enables us to do that. I loved a lot of the work of Viktor Frankl. If you are familiar with Viktor Frankl, if you're not familiar with Viktor Frankl, first of all, he was somebody who was a prisoner in the [00:06:00] Holocaust, and he was a prisoner for many years, and yet he was still able to find Positivity to find hope and in his book, man, search for meaning, which is a book I recommend to everyone.

[00:06:16] **Karyn Buxman:** If you've not read it, it should be like, in your top 100 books that you read. It was published many, many, many decades ago, but he said, it is well known that humor more than anything else in the human makeup can afford and aloofness. And an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds.

[00:06:40] **Karyn Buxman:** And when we're dealing with trauma and pain and stress, and we need that ability to come up, get a gulp of air, grab

some peace of mind, even if it's only for a few seconds. I think that this is something well worth our efforts. [00:07:00]

[00:07:00] **Christina Rouse:** Yeah. And as we get into our conversation, we know that the field of child abuse and prevention and intervention and our MDT partners with the medical field and our mental health field and our law enforcement partners.

[00:07:15] **Christina Rouse:** The work, like you mentioned, is heavy, and the humor that we tend to see a lot of the times is this gallows humor or this dark humor. But Yeah. What I would love is for you to help us define what is gallows humor and dark humor.

[00:07:35] **Karyn Buxman:** Gallows humor is simply making fun of a life threatening, disastrous, or terrifying event.

[00:07:44] **Karyn Buxman:** Now that sounds very simplistic. It's actually a very convoluted topic. And I was exposed to and used. So much gallows humor [00:08:00] when I was doing hands on nursing, I worked in the E. R. I worked in the I. C. U. We were dealing with body fluids, death and dismemberment every day. And what I found is that the closer you are to tragedy and death, the darker your humor becomes.

[00:08:21] **Karyn Buxman:** When we are exposed to things that are painful, that are unfair, that are just Ugly situations. Our humor can get very dark and it's a coping mechanism. It's actually a healthy coping mechanism. I've often said that in the health care profession. Anyway, those who don't laugh. Leave when I was a little girl, my grandmother had a pressure cooker thing used to scare me to death because I always thought it was going to explode.

[00:08:58] **Karyn Buxman:** But she tried to explain that [00:09:00] there was that little thing on the top that jiggle that let the excess pressure out. And that's what I think of about gallows humor. It's when we have this. anger and frustration about the unfairness of what is going on. We have to have a safety valve or we will blow up.

[00:09:21] **Karyn Buxman:** And I think there is a real positive case. for gallows humor. It is a double edged sword. And I know we're going to talk about that. I used to think it was just healthcare professionals. Of course, you have very tunnel vision. And at first I thought, Oh, this is just doctors and nurses talking about body fluids, death and dismemberment.

[00:09:42] **Karyn Buxman:** And then I realized, Oh no, it's the EMTs. Oh, it's the police. Oh, it's firemen. Oh, it's military. My husband, he's a ghost writer, and he recently authored a book for POWs from Vietnam. And I will have [00:10:00] to say, their humor was tremendous. Was it sick? Absolutely. But it helped them Survive and thrive in a life or death situation that was extended for over a period of years and in a way the people who are serving these children are doing somewhat the same thing.

[00:10:25] **Karyn Buxman:** These are life and death situations that you're working on. And you're having to do it over an extended period of time. And you have to have a release. Now, there's many things That you can use, but I don't think there are many, if any at all, which is why I'm so passionate about this that can be done on the spot.

[00:10:49] **Karyn Buxman:** No extra equipment, no extra changing of your environment or anything like that. You don't have to lay down. You don't have to turn off lights. [00:11:00] You don't have to have a piece of equipment. You just can be in the moment. And practice humor, and I'm going to talk to you about some ways that you can practice humor, even if you're not funny, especially if you're not funny, because so many people think that the purpose of humor is to entertain other people to make them laugh and that is.

[00:11:22] **Karyn Buxman:** So fun. And that is a huge component of all of this. And we measure our success in entertainment by laughs per minute. I know I've done some standup and I've coached even comedians to help them up their game so they can get more LPMs. But what I identified in my work 30 years was that there's actually two more purposes of humor.

[00:11:46] **Karyn Buxman:** One is influence. How do we persuade? How do we educate? How do we enlighten? How do we. people. And we don't measure that and how much we make them laugh. We measure that by

achieving our goals [00:12:00] and the quality of our relationships. And the third is wellbeing. And I mean this in a very holistic sense, our physical wellbeing, our psychological wellbeing, our social wellbeing, our spiritual wellbeing, all of these things.

[00:12:15] **Karyn Buxman:** come into play. So this is one of the reasons why I think this can be such a healthy coping mechanism because especially the psychological and emotional components of the work that these wonderful people do. And, um, They need to have a healthy coping mechanism because many turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms, whether that's drinking, whether that's drugs, whether it's excess medications or alcohol, or even excessive retail therapy, or whatever.

[00:12:50] **Karyn Buxman:** There's all different kinds of ways that people manage their stress, but this is a totally portable skill that you can take with you any place and any time.

[00:12:59] **Christina Rouse:** Yeah. I [00:13:00] love that you named that there is a purpose and a place for gallows humor because I think for so long in the child advocacy field, we know people are using it.

[00:13:11] **Christina Rouse:** We know our professionals are engaging in it. But there hasn't been really a lot of conversation about what that framework should look like and how can we talk about the utilization of Gallo's humor. One of the colleagues I was chatting with when we were creating this episode actually raised a really insightful question is that is the humor used by CAC professionals or professionals who investigate child abuse cases?

[00:13:39] **Christina Rouse:** Is there a difference between gallows humor and dark humor, and maybe just workplace humor where your work content is dark or heavy?

[00:13:50] **Karyn Buxman:** Right. And I think that what defines workplace humor is simply humor that's used in the [00:14:00] workplace. It can be appropriate, it can be inappropriate, it can be dark humor, it can be fun humor.

[00:14:04] **Karyn Buxman:** The fact that you use dark humor. Or gallows humor in the workplace isn't the only kind of humor that you use. I would imagine. I would also think that people are telling funny stories about what their spouse did, or this is an interesting thing. And I haven't mentioned this yet. When we're young children, you look at young children, you look at what they laugh about.

[00:14:27] **Karyn Buxman:** Most of the humor of young children comes from joy and delight. They're just bubbling. They're just laughing. You can feel it come from their very core. And as we get older, we tend to have more of our pain coming from relief. It is humor that is about things that are frustrating to us or make us angry.

[00:14:59] **Karyn Buxman:** And we laugh [00:15:00] about it. One of my mentors, Vera Robinson, said that one of the functions of humor is that it allows people to express things that make them angry or scared in a socially acceptable way. And so in the workplace, there's lots of different kinds of humor going on. Our brains are a little bit more, I think, in tune to find and experience the dark humor.

[00:15:24] **Christina Rouse:** Yeah, you mentioned those that are closer to tragedy and trauma and tend to use gallows humor more often. I'd be curious to know why. Why is it those professionals particularly use gallows humor more often than a postman or a teacher or something like that?

[00:15:45] **Karyn Buxman:** Right. Well, if we go back to what I mentioned before, the closer we are to tragedy and death, the darker our humor becomes.

[00:15:52] **Karyn Buxman:** And what I did see is that people after I'm going way back, but the OJ Simpson [00:16:00] trial in the Bronco, People were making jokes about the Bronco that were sick. People made jokes about the shuttle challenger after it blew up. It was very dark humor. There's actually a book that was published way back in 1987 by a gentleman named Alan Dundas called cracking jokes, and it was examining sick humor cycles and pretty much anything that is horrific, there will be someone who Finds or creates some humor around it.

[00:16:30] **Karyn Buxman:** The reason that we find this so much more prevalent in the workspace that our listeners are in is because they're experiencing tragedy and unfairness on a high level. They're experiencing it on such a regular basis. If this were only a case once in a while, once a year, once every few years, this wouldn't be so pervasive, but because of the amount.

[00:16:58] **Karyn Buxman:** Of this, we really do [00:17:00] recognize that it's going to be more prevalent. It's going to be more abundant because it's more needed.

[00:17:07] **Christina Rouse:** So when we. We're preparing. We talked to some CAC and MDT frontline professionals. We asked them, why do you use gallows humor and what are the benefits for you when you use it?

[00:17:20] **Christina Rouse:** So let's hear what they had to say. And then Karyn, I'd love to hear your thoughts about that.

[00:17:26] **Sound Bite:** I just tend to use humor as a coping skill to help regulate my own emotions. In addition to that, I'm using it often when talking about uncomfortable things. So humor for me is a great skill. For me, it's just easy then to Crossover into dark humor, because I am talking about uncomfortable things and often my dark humor.

[00:17:52] **Sound Bite:** I explained my humor in general is not intended to minimize. People who are victimized, including [00:18:00] children, it's not intended to minimize. The impact of the information, and it's not intended to be offensive or insulting or anything. Adverbs. I'm just using it because it's, it's helping me to get it out. So for dark humor, I think so many people connect with it.

[00:18:21] **Sound Bite:** I think that's a cultural thing for us in the United States. That it becomes just a, a currency in interactions. It helps just facilitate the work we do. I'm trying to think back, like, not only in my work at the CAC did I use Dark humor, sometimes with humor in general, but in every kind of situation that I've always been in, and for various reasons, to remind myself that this doesn't have to be so heavy, because it can feel real, real heavy at times, we know that.



[00:18:52] **Sound Bite:** There's a moment where I also wonder, does it give me a sense of control about how random sometimes [00:19:00] victimization feels? Or that if I can joke about it, I can control it a little bit more, then it won't happen to someone I know. There's some aspect of it allowing me to, like, control the narrative.

[00:19:13] **Karyn Buxman:** Wow. I love those sound bites.

[00:19:16] **Karyn Buxman:** So, let's take a look. The first person talked about the fact that they're using humor as a coping skill. And I applaud that. Because humor is recognized as a healthy coping mechanism, and humor can help people express their anger, express their fear, express their feelings of disgust in a socially acceptable way, and in a way that's going to make them feel better.

[00:19:43] **Karyn Buxman:** Feel better and can actually make them healthier a little bit later. You and I are going to discuss some guidelines there, but it is a coping mechanism. And for the 2nd person, they were talking about giving them a sense of control and allowing them to control the narrative. And if we go [00:20:00] back to what I mentioned earlier about the brain threats and how people want autonomy.

[00:20:06] **Karyn Buxman:** People want control. They want to feel like they have some kind of control of the situation. And even if it just gives them this one little piece, it allows you to have that sense of control by being able to joke about it. The other thing is that humor is power. When you think about it, humor can be a tool.

[00:20:27] **Karyn Buxman:** Humor can be a weapon. And when I am coaching or addressing or speaking to people and talking about the power of humor and how we want to use our powers for good. That being said, sometimes. When everybody's laughing together, we are equalizing the playing field. Everybody is on the same level, but the person who initiates the humor tends to usually be recognized even at a non conscious level as the one who is a little [00:21:00] bit more powerful because to do that, they have the least to lose.

[00:21:05] **Karyn Buxman:** Um, humor is a risk and they're willing to take that risk. And so by doing that, they're gaining a sense of control, empowering themselves. And it's like a cancer patient being able to laugh at cancer. It takes them from being the victim to the victor. And so in various kinds of situations, being able to.

[00:21:27] **Karyn Buxman:** Laugh about it gives you that sense of hierarchy of empowerment of being able to put down that other person or that situation or that behavior.

[00:21:39] **Christina Rouse:** I love that you named that humor is power, but also a weapon. And I'm sure that there are potential negative consequences. to using gallows humor, or maybe more of how you're using gallows humor.

[00:21:57] **Christina Rouse:** So what are the potential risks of that in a [00:22:00] professional setting?

[00:22:02] **Karyn Buxman:** Well, in a professional setting, there can be emotional harm. There can be a loss of trust. There can be a loss of connection and over the years, I have developed a number of competencies. Actually, right now, I have 7 competencies and I believe these are going to be in the show notes.

[00:22:27] **Karyn Buxman:** But with the seven competencies, and I'll just list them briefly. The first one being your rapport with that other person or the bond. What is the connection that you have with them? The second is the context. Because humor that's appropriate in one place might not be appropriate in another setting. And so the context, the environment has to be right.

[00:22:53] **Karyn Buxman:** And I'm going to come back and give you an example of that in a moment. The next 1 is being [00:23:00] true to yourself, being authentic, not trying to be somebody else, or to just. Be fake. We don't see that a whole lot, but when you see it, oh, my goodness, it's cringeworthy. The next one is safety and safety is a huge one.

[00:23:17] **Karyn Buxman:** Can somebody be physically or emotionally or psychologically harmed with your humor and if in doubt, please That's a time we want to move to a different kind of humor. Timing is another, and by this, timing is made up of distances. It's made up of temporal distance. How long ago did it happen? Because the longer ago it happened, the more safe it feels.

[00:23:43] **Karyn Buxman:** It doesn't feel as threatening as it did in the moment. It can be made up of geographical distance. Something that happens far away. It's funnier to us than to the people who are in the midst of it. I remember when some colleagues of [00:24:00] mine were in the path of an oncoming hurricane, and I texted them and I was wishing them well.

[00:24:07] **Karyn Buxman:** And I said, I know it's probably too soon, but when you're ready for some hurricane jokes, I have a bunch of funny memes and they said, send them now. So I had permission, but if you're at the peak of a crisis, sometimes humor is not something you're ready for. So all of these things create an even cognitive distance because you can think about it.

[00:24:27] **Karyn Buxman:** You can dissect it and you can realize, well, because of this and this and this, this is why the situation is funny or whatever, or why it's not funny. And so you can. Create this emotional space so that it feels funny, that it feels safe or not. So after that, we have the content, which is the language that everybody's using.

[00:24:50] **Karyn Buxman:** And we have the delivery. And most people, when they come to me, want to start with those last two. When in fact, what I have discovered is [00:25:00] that those two come much more naturally when you understand and can manage. The first five, not that they're in any particular weighted order, because sometimes your relationship is more important.

[00:25:12] **Karyn Buxman:** Sometimes the setting is more important. But when people have a grasp of those things, they are less likely to cause harm, but certainly in the workplace, you can. People can feel violated if

you're using humor and you haven't taken those seven different things into account.

[00:25:32] **Christina Rouse:** Yeah, when you mentioned context, I know in the CAC world, a lot of times we say if folks overheard our conversations that we were having at lunch, they would be appalled that we would be even talking about those things or talking in that manner.

[00:25:51] **Christina Rouse:** And I wonder if that's part of it because when I've used Gallo's Humor, it has been very much about [00:26:00] this is a thing we're all a part of, and that the folks using it can relate to, they understand it. If I were to attempt to use some of that Gallo's Humor with someone outside of the work I did, I would be looked at in a much different way, I think.

[00:26:17] **Karyn Buxman:** Oh, they would think you were a horrible, horrible person when we all know that you are not. A quick example of this was when I was talking and touring a particular hospital, a nurse supervisor pulled me aside and she said I was rounding at the hospital. A few evenings ago and every time I went to a unit, people burst into laughter and I would say, what was so funny?

[00:26:41] **Karyn Buxman:** And they'd say, oh, nothing, nothing. And she said, you know, I look my zippers up. I don't have anything stuck between my teeth. I couldn't figure out what was so funny until the end of the shift. And I went to my office and I hung up my lab coat and it was then that I saw the note. Post it note that somebody had slapped on my back [00:27:00] that said, I'm homeless and will work for food.

[00:27:03] **Karyn Buxman:** And she said, normally that would have been pretty funny. She said, but that night I did discharge planning to a man and his family who had nowhere to go. And I know that they had to have seen that note on my back. Now they weren't the intended audience. But they ended up being the audience and that wasn't the context for which that was meant to happen, but it did.

[00:27:26] **Karyn Buxman:** And so these are the kinds of things that if we can be more mindful and intentional and aware of our humor, it's going to be even more powerful than what it is currently.

[00:27:41] **Christina Rouse:** Yeah. When we were talking to our colleagues, they had mentioned this. Kind of mindfulness that I think CEC professionals need to keep in the back of their head.

[00:27:52] **Christina Rouse:** So I love that you named these competencies and I know we're going to kind of get into them a little more. I think one of the [00:28:00] concerns in our field is there seems to be such a fine line. of when that gallows humor kind of crosses over to being misused or mishandled. And so how did the competencies fit into helping you know where that line is?

[00:28:22] **Karyn Buxman:** Such a great question because people want to know Where's the line? Where's the line? I don't want to cross it. Well, here's the good news. There's no line, but here's the bad news. It's a moving target. It's like trying to step over a line. That's constantly moving and this is 1 of the reasons why I developed these competencies.

[00:28:42] **Karyn Buxman:** And I actually developed a tool. It's a training tool where we take a scenario, and then we run it through the competencies and we actually. We rate it on a scale of one to five. And we ask the question, did this humor move the relationship [00:29:00] forward? Did it move it forward? Did it move it backward? Did the person who was experiencing the humor, was there any threat to their physical, emotional, psychological safety?

[00:29:09] **Karyn Buxman:** And we rate these to give people that better sense and to give them some guidance because the people. who are working with these children. You guys don't want to cross the line. You don't want to offend somebody. And so help them. I had a VP of an organization come up to me and she was telling me about the new hire that she had.

[00:29:32] **Karyn Buxman:** And there was a lot of humor that was used in their office. And This girl tried to fit in and was getting some pushback. So she tried harder and her style of humor was sarcasm. And that was not

fitting with the office culture and the harder she tried, the more they pushed back and it was becoming problematic.

[00:29:51] **Karyn Buxman:** So the VP told the young woman, please just don't use humor at work. And she asked me, was that a appropriate thing to do? And I said, well, that's one [00:30:00] choice that you have, or you could give her some guidance, because if you can show her how to use humor effectively and constructively, now she has a better connection with her colleagues.

[00:30:14] **Karyn Buxman:** Now, she has a better connection. with your clients. Now she feels better about herself and everybody wins sarcasm. I just want to say here, as an aside is such a wonderful, fun type of humor that many people use. It can get very dark and very edgy. And the root word of sarcasm actually means to tear the flesh.

[00:30:38] **Karyn Buxman:** And if you've ever been hit with an effective piece of sarcasm, you know, Now, if you have a rapport with somebody, we go back to that beginning of the seven competencies, and you have a long standing relationship and you have the component of feeling safe, [00:31:00] then it becomes It's fun. It's a play. It's verbal sparring.

[00:31:04] **Karyn Buxman:** But that's because there's this tacit agreement between the two people that this is okay. If you're using sarcasm with somebody who doesn't know you well, who doesn't have that feeling of safety, who doesn't have that relationship with you, this is a very aggressive and put down type of humor. And so you need to ask those questions as to, is this the right person?

[00:31:25] **Karyn Buxman:** Is this the right place? Is this a safe thing to do? Do I want to use my humor? Sarcasm is a weapon. Now, it's a light weapon. It could be a fun weapon. I speak sarcasm fluently with the right people, but we have to know when and where to use it.

[00:31:40] **Christina Rouse:** I think a lot of times with people not understanding maybe what these competencies are or what the role of humor is in the workplace or even the expectation of how a team uses it together, A lot of people are just going off that gut feeling of when they

know, uh oh, I made a mistake or maybe this wasn't the right thing to [00:32:00] say.

[00:32:00] **Christina Rouse:** So let's hear how some of this kind of gut feeling, did I cross the line, did I not cross the line land with some of our professionals.

[00:32:10] **Sound Bite:** Playful, kind of dark humor, but there's that line between that and somewhat victim blaming kind of statements or things you throw out there where I really then would struggle.

[00:32:20] **Sound Bite:** In one situation in particular, without details. Um, someone made a comment that I thought, Oh, you were, you were right on that line, uh, being inappropriate or really just out of line. And someone that was with me, that was new was just shocked that someone would say something like that. And our conversation was, well, let's take into account.

[00:32:43] **Sound Bite:** What are some of those factors? There's connection how long this person had been in the field. Are they experiencing any level of distress like burnout? Or secondary traumatic stress. We don't know and also this particular case, [00:33:00] there was such a high level of frustration with what was happening. I'm just not sure the entity knew what else to say or do.

[00:33:08] **Sound Bite:** And so for them, kind of crossing this line. Was just a way to say, we're all in this together. We are all frustrating. We don't know what to do. We don't seem like we're helping and that I think contributed to the health of that team in that moment. The times that I have been on that line, or I've crossed the line, or the times that I have made.

[00:33:31] **Sound Bite:** Quick comments that truly were inappropriate and it had to do with, you know, it, it, it could be a part of victim blaming. It could have been someone's appearance. And when I've done that, like, I know right away, I've gone into territory that I don't think I should be in.

[00:33:52] **Karyn Buxman:** Listening to your gut that can be helpful.

[00:33:55] **Karyn Buxman:** Sometimes, though, our gut doesn't tell us until after the fact. Oh, [00:34:00] yeah, I shouldn't have stepped there, which is why I really encourage people to be more intentional to take a breath. To think about that stimulus response, Victor Frankel, who obviously I'm a big fan, cause I've already quoted him once, but one of my actual favorite quote of Victor Frankel's was that between stimulus and response, there's a space.

[00:34:24] **Karyn Buxman:** And in that space lies our power and our freedom to choose our response. And in our response lies our growth and our happiness. What are we going to put in that space? And sometimes. We don't put anything in there. We just go into the automatic. We have neuron networks and loops of automatic responses.

[00:34:51] **Karyn Buxman:** And that's how that comes across so quickly. And it does take practice. It does take some [00:35:00] mastery of using humor intentionally. You're still going to sometimes just rip one off. I think that's okay. I think that in the situations. Where it was a misstep, I think you acknowledge it and you say, you know what, that really wasn't appropriate, or I didn't mean to go there.

[00:35:20] **Karyn Buxman:** If I offended you, please accept my apologies, something to that effect. If you're the recipient, you have several choices. You can say nothing and just take that breath. Separate that person from their action as the previous person was talking about and let that go, you can say something to them and give them some guidance and say, you know what, if you and I had been at happy hour over at Sammy's.

[00:35:51] **Karyn Buxman:** That would have been okay, but you know, here, I don't know. I think that crossed the line. What do you think? And maybe have a conversation about it. There also [00:36:00] sometimes can be situations where you are being the victim of somebody's inappropriate behavior, whether that's an aggression, whether it's a microaggression, whether it's a sexual harassment, there's all different kinds of things that people can do in the guise of humor because they want to use it as a weapon, but not really.



[00:36:18] **Karyn Buxman:** And Oh, if you let somebody say, I'm joking, or can't you take a joke? I'm going to bet that 99 percent of the time that person didn't mean it as a joke. I'm going to bet that that person meant it as a weapon. And if you're feeling threatened or harmed, and that person may be your boss, what do you do then?

[00:36:41] **Karyn Buxman:** You report it to somebody else whom you feel safe with. It's not right. No matter what the kind of abuse is, whether it's verbal, whether it's joking, whatever, no one has the right to do that to you. But you in turn should also take responsibility for your actions [00:37:00] and your own humor.

[00:37:01] **Christina Rouse:** Because we've talked about the benefits of gallows humor, dark humor, or workplace humor that is utilized with our professionals.

[00:37:12] **Christina Rouse:** How can a leader really craft either the understanding or explanation of how they want that to be used in the workplace? Or how do you bring new people into that culture? In our child welfare system, turnovers are high. A lot of people leave their work. We have new people coming in all the time. And sometimes I worry that if a new person walks into a conversation that they weren't prepped with, or that they understood that that's the culture of the workplace.

[00:37:45] **Christina Rouse:** How damaging that could be, both for maybe the reputation of the team or the organization, but what is some guidance for leaders to take away and utilize in GALA's humor?

[00:37:56] **Karyn Buxman:** That's one of the best questions I've been asked in a long time. [00:38:00] I love that because I think this is really an opportunity. For a leader to shine.

[00:38:07] **Karyn Buxman:** And I have met one or two who have done this and done this well. And I think that when the leader takes an opportunity to have a conversation with this new hire and to ask questions, ask questions about, do you like humor? What's your style of humor? What makes you laugh? And to explain that because of the circumstances here, because things can be.

[00:38:35] **Karyn Buxman:** so tragic and so devastating that what we tend to experience here is a lot of gallows humor or sick humor. And we try to keep it confined to within the group. It's never meant to hurt anyone, but how would that make you feel if you were to experience that [00:39:00] and to listen to what they have to say and to.

[00:39:04] **Karyn Buxman:** Give them the out that this is our culture and if chances are really high that you're going to experience this, and if that's a deal breaker for you, we wish you well, we're hoping because of all the wonderful qualifications that you have, that you can join our team, join our corporate culture and, you know, Connect with us and help us do a better job of serving those children whom we were meant to serve and we welcome your input and we welcome your feedback and then sit back and listen, because I think that most people, when they're given some preparation, and they can understand ahead of time why people are using it and for the leader to say, if somebody crosses the line, we're Let them know or let me know, because we [00:40:00] want this to make us healthier, but we don't want it to become hurtful.

[00:40:06] **Karyn Buxman:** And I think if the leader can do that, I think that the likelihood of that person sticking around for longer is much higher.

[00:40:15] **Christina Rouse:** When I think to just giving them maybe that little bit of education that we talked about when we first started our conversation about. What it does for us that are serving trauma victims of it being that release valve and that when it happens, that's why it's happening.

[00:40:33] **Christina Rouse:** I think a lot of times when there's confusion or conflict amongst team members or colleagues, it's because of just misunderstanding. And so focusing on it being the release valve of our pressure cooker that we work in.

[00:40:50] **Karyn Buxman:** Yeah. Absolutely.

[00:40:53] **Christina Rouse:** So we've talked a lot about how our CAC professionals and our MDT partners are engaging in gallows [00:41:00] humor.

[00:41:00] **Christina Rouse:** It's not if they're going to, we already know that they are. However, how can we use just regular humor? Maybe we don't want to engage in gallows humor. What are some ways that professionals can incorporate? regular humor into their everyday.

[00:41:16] **Karyn Buxman:** This is coming full circle because back in the beginning I talked about our brain constantly searching for threat and that's the way our brains are wired.

[00:41:24] **Karyn Buxman:** And when we repeat these behaviors or experiences Our brains wire again and again and again, creating stronger neural networks. And so what we see is likely to be repeated. It's a little bit like I was looking at some really cool shoes on Zappos, but it was, Oh, look how much those are. So I went to a different website and what shows up on the side.

[00:41:50] **Karyn Buxman:** Those shoes and then I go to a different website and now I get two choices of shoes just like the ones that I saw in Sappos and then I go to another one and it shows me those shoes and off the [00:42:00] other side there's an ad for a purse that would go just great with those shoes. Why was the internet showing this to me?

[00:42:05] **Karyn Buxman:** Because I put my focus on something and the internet said oh you put your focus on that. No judgment. We'll just show you more of that. And that's what your reticular activating system does. When you put your focus on something, your brain says, Oh, you're interested in that. I'll show you more of that. And it gives you more of those instances.

[00:42:26] **Karyn Buxman:** So we have to, in some way, rewire our brains to experience different kinds of humor because it's there. We just don't see it because. We don't have that particular lens on and so things go by us that when you have the lens of humor on, you're going to see these things or hear these things that other people are missing.

[00:42:55] **Karyn Buxman:** I was trying on clothes the other day. At a clothing store [00:43:00] and I never saw the woman, but apparently she was trying on a dress that might have been a little small because as I'm

trying on a pair of jeans, I hear the woman say, good Lord, if this dress were any tighter, it would fit me like a mammogram.

[00:43:18] **Karyn Buxman:** That was the funniest thing I'd heard all day. I stopped putting on the jeans and I wrote it down and I stuck it in my bag and then I forgot about it. And a week later, I'm searching for something else and I pull it out. So there's a clue when you hear something or see something, especially newly on, write it down because our brains aren't yet wired.

[00:43:39] **Karyn Buxman:** To hang on to it, but search for different kinds of positive humor, seek different kinds of positive humor, asking your colleagues. What's the funniest thing that your child did this week? What was the funniest thing? They made you laugh on television. What was the memories and [00:44:00] stories that we have from?

[00:44:02] **Karyn Buxman:** Certain special events. What was the funniest thing that ever happened to you at Thanksgiving? There's lots of different ways. We can seek humor from other people seeking the humorous and funny experiences. They get the benefit because they're laughing about it. You get the benefit because you're laughing about it.

[00:44:18] **Karyn Buxman:** You've created that bond, which also, when we have shared Creates outpouring of oxytocin, which is the bonding hormone, which connects people, the mother baby hormone, the cuddle hormone. So there's lots of ways that we can use to bond, to be looking for humor and really acknowledge it. When you see a funny bumper sticker, when you see a funny sign, when you hear something funny said, there was a gym in San Diego I took a picture of because it was at the top of a bunch of stairs.

[00:44:48] **Karyn Buxman:** And they had an escalator. Really? You're going to provide an escalator for a gym? So that people can go up and use a stair master? Why don't they just take the stairs outside? Just little subtle things. [00:45:00] They don't have to be fall down funny. You're just training your brain to look for the absurdity. And the whimsy around you have an accountability partner.

[00:45:09] **Karyn Buxman:** I have an accountability partner and she suffers from depression. And at first I thought, Oh, what a good friend am I by doing this for her? I promised her that every day I'll send you a funny meme. What I realized, and this has been years ago, After the first couple of weeks, I realized it was benefiting me as much or more because I was starting my morning every single morning and I do it to this day, spending at least 20 minutes searching through different kinds of humor so that I can find humor that I can send to my friends.

[00:45:40] **Karyn Buxman:** How do you think my day now starts when I have framed it? With the starting and looking for humor. It's like putting on sunscreen before you go out into the sun, have funny things, bookmarked shows, videos, go tos. I have a couple of clips on YouTube that when I'm feeling [00:46:00] stressed, I know exactly which YouTube to go to laughing babies, who can keep your.

[00:46:06] **Karyn Buxman:** Shoulders up to your earlobes when you're watching laughing babies. So lots of things that you can do intentionally to help you experience more humor. And of course, anybody who wants to have more input on that tap me because I would love to help you get more of that. I think it really can change our world.

[00:46:28] **Christina Rouse:** Well, I think too, even if folks might not think that that's. That's going to happen in the workplace. Those are things that you can do when the workday is over. And I would also just kind of echo that it's almost more important for the people in our profession to find the funny, to be able to kind of tap into the things that it makes our brain do so that we can stay in the work longer.

[00:46:54] **Christina Rouse:** Yeah, when my children were

[00:46:55] **Karyn Buxman:** young, that was part of our dinner conversation during dinner conversation. What was the funniest thing that [00:47:00] happened today in school? And it also helped them reframe their day. It allowed us to have conversation at the dinner table. It allowed us to have greater connection as a family.

[00:47:12] **Karyn Buxman:** And those are the kinds of practices that will work for you in your relationship with your children, your spouse, your parents, your friends, your colleagues, your church members. People bond, Victor Borg said laughter is the shortest distance between two people and it really is, it brings us together.

[00:47:30] **Christina Rouse:** So I imagine we might have some listeners thinking or having the thought that child abuse investigations, child sexual abuse, physical abuse, harm to children, children who witness homicide, you can't laugh.

[00:47:44] **Christina Rouse:** about that stuff. And so what can we tell those listeners who might be worried that there is no place in laughter in our field?

[00:47:53] **Karyn Buxman:** What I would say is to reframe that just a little bit. And that is that abused children [00:48:00] are no joke. Absolutely no joke. But it can be a laughing matter because we know that laughter can heal laughter, can heal us.

[00:48:11] **Karyn Buxman:** It can help heal the children. It can help us do a better job of serving them because it gives us our full cognitive capacity. It gives us our ability to problem solve. It gives us our ability to connect, not just head to head, but heart to heart. While it is no joke, I would challenge them and say, think about this as a laughing matter and how can you harness humor and leverage laughter so that you can do a better job of serving those that you've been called to serve.

[00:48:41] **Karyn Buxman:** I encourage you to choose humor and may you have an abundance of humor and laughter throughout the rest of your days.

[00:48:50] **Christina Rouse:** Remember, it's okay to laugh, especially when things are tough. Just keep in mind that humor is a powerful tool for coping and [00:49:00] healing if we use it with care and compassion. Thank you for joining us for a thought provoking conversation.

[00:49:09] **Christina Rouse:** Much appreciation for our guests on this episode. Remember, in the moments between episodes, look for the invisible threads that connect you to your purpose. If what you heard sparked your curiosity to learn more, hit the subscribe button and follow us on Facebook and LinkedIn at Southern Regional Children's Advocacy Center for more learning content.

[00:49:31] **Christina Rouse:** All resources mentioned in this podcast are linked in the show notes below. Below the S-R-C-A-C Exchange Podcast is made possible through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, US Department of Justice under award number one five PJ DP 22 GK 0 3 0 5 9 JJ vo. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this podcast are [00:50:00] those of the guests and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice.

[00:50:04] **Christina Rouse:** The SRC AC exchange podcast. Season three is hosted by me, Christina Rouse and produced by peach tree. Sound music provided by midnight dream.