

Why We Laugh at the Most Inappropriate Times and What It Says About Us

August 24, 2021

Laughter is best described as a [physiological response to humor](#). In fact, humans can giggle as early as [three months old](#). The fact that laughter kicks in before babies can even speak shows us the importance it plays in daily life: As a [nonverbal communication cue](#), laughter plays a major role in social communication. The simple act allows us to connect with others.

However, chortles can also divide us: Some people can't help but laugh during extremely stressful situations such as a funeral. Typically, [nervous laughter](#) results from feelings of anxiety, tension, confusion or even embarrassment.

Nervous laughter was first studied by psychologist Stanley Milgram in the 1960s. Milgram conducted famous [obedience experiments](#) in which participants referred to as "teachers" were instructed to shock "learners" for wrong answers. The shocks increased in power from a slight shock of 15 volts to a severe shock of 450 volts. Though the learners didn't actually receive zaps, the teachers believed they did.

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