Longevity in action
Laugh to a better life

# Facilitator Preparation (What You’ll Need)

* Mindset worksheets
* Writing utensils
* A copy of Dr. Roger Landry’s *Live Long, Die Short: A Guide to Authentic Health and Successful Aging* (optional)
* Joke or funny story (optional)\*
* Laughter party (optional)\*

# Session Content:

Please read this aloud:

A few reminders before we begin …

* Please be respectful to one another. Everyone in this room comes from a different background that has formulated who they are as a person and contributed to their unique opinions. As a group, we will observe *respect* as a guiding principle as we interact with one another. It is our goal that all participants feel valued, respected, and heard.
* Share without imposing your beliefs on others. Please refrain from convincing others to adopt your opinions.
* Keep an open mind. Our discussions will be thought-provoking and insightful. You may not agree with everything you hear, but please be willing to consider opinions that may be different from your own.

# Today’s Objectives:

Please share these objectives with participants.

* To explore ways to incorporate more laughter into our lives.
* To understand the health benefits of laughing daily.

# Opening Passage: Laugh to a Better Life / Laughing at 100

Read this excerpt from *Live Long, Die Short* aloud: Page 177-178.

Norman Cousins reacted the way any of us would have on hearing he had an incurable, crippling illness. There was the shock, denial, and anger. But then, he broke from the rest of us. He decided he could not be a passive observer of his own health. Norman Cousins began to laugh.
*Why not?* he thought. He was feeling pretty low and wanted to feel better. He knew laughter always made him feel physically, emotionally, and psychologically better, so why not laugh now? He had read in Hans Selye’s classic 1956 book, *The Stress of Life*, of how stress and negative emotions could cause negative chemical changes in the body.1 Couldn’t positive emotions, then, cause *positive* chemical changes? Why not laugh and see if this was possible?

Of course, most of us could think of a lot of reasons why not, but Norman, a journalist, editor, and world peace activist, looked at his situation differently. In his 1979 book, *Anatomy of an Illness*, he describes how after his diagnosis of ankylosing spondylitis, a degenerative disease of the spine, he rented a movie projector, Marx Brothers movies, and old episodes of *Candid Camera*.2 He recognized almost immediately, after just ten minutes of laughing, that his pain was better. He continued to laugh. He laughed, and laughed, and laughed himself into remission for nearly thirty years, finally succumbing to heart disease. His physicians had no explanation for his remission. Could laughing have been responsible?

**Laughing at 100**

Results from the Boston University–based New England Centenarian Study indicate that it’s possible to laugh yourself to better health, aging, and even longevity. A preliminary conclusion of this 15-year-plus study is that those who live to be a hundred or more seem to be able to handle stress better than the majority of people. These are people who have lived long enough to experience significant loss in their lives, so they are realists. Yet, they believe they will meet whatever lies ahead when the time comes, so there’s no need to fret about it now. (This is consistent with the “living in the present moment” approach we discussed in Tip Seven.)

# Laughter researcher Robert Provine tells us that laughter is a primitive attribute, “an unconscious vocalization,” and he considers it a “universal human vocabulary.” It is observable to some degree in other primates and is present in babies even before they can speak. Babies laugh as much as three hundred times per day, as opposed to we more somber adults, who average twenty times per day. Laughter is considered by most to be a human behavior and is strongly associated with positive human connection and social interaction, being part of a group. We have discussed social connection as a lifestyle characteristic strongly associated with successful aging, and so it would seem very consistent to associate better health with laughter. So what could be going on here? Can laughter somehow change our physiology?

# Group Discussion (Stories and Jokes)

Please read aloud:

(If necessary, please remind participants to be respectful by limiting answers to about a minute so that more people have time to share.)

We know that laughter actually boosts our immune function, reduces our stress, enhances our mood and makes us more resilient (not to mention the abdominal workout we get from laughing). Today, we’re going to make sure we take in our daily dose of laughter!

# Question: When do you find yourself laughing the most?

# Question: What are some of the ways that you invite more laughter into your life?

# Question: Before this session, we invited people bring a joke or a funny story. Who would like to share their joke or story with us?

# (Optional) Group Activity: Laughter Party

*(Note to facilitator: Throw a Laughter Party and encourage partygoers to dress as their favorite TV sitcom character, cartoon or funny man/woman. Play a few games and have people laugh on cue every time someone says, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.” Give a prize for the person with the most rambunctious laugh!*

*There are ways to make laughter a priority and to enhance your party. Here are a few ideas to get you started …*

* *Plan a special movie viewing and hand out funny hats, noise-makers and Groucho glasses.*
* *Find a laughter yoga instructor near you to host a class at your location or host your own laughter class. (****Hint:*** *Here’s a sample of Laughter Yoga and resources for building your own class. Laughter Yoga Video:* [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fq4kTZuLops*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fq4kTZuLops)*. Here is a free online class:* [*https://www.drkasimalmashat.com/free-online-laughter-yoga.html*](https://www.drkasimalmashat.com/free-online-laughter-yoga.html)*)*
* *Invite a comedy troupe to perform on location. Or, gather a group of willing participants and host your own comedy show.*
* *Have a few willing participants do a stand-up routine or share their joke from the discussion group.*
* *Try having an entire conversation with someone using only song lyrics or lines from movies.*
* *As a fun experiment, provide three random words or objects to a friend, and ask them to wrap a story around it.*
* *Spend time with kids and animals … they’ll do all the work for you!*
* *Turn the sound off on a movie and make up your own dialogue between people.)*

# Wrapping Up Today’s Session

Please read this aloud:

Thank you, everyone, for being here to share your time and your thoughts with each other. We look forward to many more insightful opportunities and discussions from *Live Long, Die Short* about building resilience. As a reminder, our next session is scheduled for [Day – Date – Time – Location]. Our topic is [Topic Name]. You are welcome and encouraged to bring a friend, but please RSVP for both of you. The sign-up sheet is located [Location]. Additionally, if you would like to assist with facilitating next week’s session or a future session, please let me know.

Before you go, please take a few minutes to write down a brief journal entry about today’s session. It can be anything from notes you’d like to remember or a personal initiative you might like to take. Before each entry, you’ll notice a couple of questions to think about, and you’ll have the opportunity to sum up this session in a simple word or phrase. Your journal is for your eyes only. Remember, I am always available to help answer any additional questions you may have about this journey.

*\* These materials are for OPTIONAL events*