

A Healthy Dose of Laughter

Bill and Linda Hamaker help people better well-being through a form of yoga that makes them chuckle.

by Kyle Noone
Editorial assistant

Laughter is a basic human reaction. Everybody laughs, some more than others, but even the crankiest of people crack a smile once in a while. If you ask Bill and Linda Hamaker, laughter is more than an expression. It is medicine.

The Hamakers are certified laughter yoga teachers. Linda said she had seen laughter yoga on “Oprah” and “Today,” and her curiosity grew. The couple eventually decided to give it a shot, attending a seminar in 2008. They liked it so much

they started attending regular meetings at a club nearly an hour from their home. Noticing an absence in their more immediate area, they decided to open their own laughter club in 2009. They have since expanded to four, receiving their certification in 2010.

Laughter yoga is a form of exercise that emphasizes the power of laughter and its positive health effects. “People love it and people need it,” Linda said. “It’s an uplifting experience to laugh for no reason.” The practice is believed to lower stress and blood pressure while improving circulation and oxygen levels. The Hamakers credit Dr. Madan Kataria, the Indian physician who started the first laughter club in 1995, with spreading the word of this form of exercise. There are now thousands of clubs in 75 countries.

Linda says that though the “yoga” aspect of laughter yoga may worry some participants at first, no complicated poses are included. Participants don’t need any experience or equipment for these informal meetings.

The Hamakers take pride in conducting sessions extending to all ages and physical ability levels. When they say “all ages,” they mean it. In fact, their youngest participant was an infant.

Most exercises come from Kataria’s own 40 foundation exercises. From there, Bill said, participants are free to experiment and make up their own exercises.

Exercises include the cellphone exercise, in which a participant laughs while pretending to hear a joke on a cellphone. They also include argument laughs, in which participants act out an argument while laughing. The argument laugh usually leads to the apology laugh, when the conflicted participants make amends. “Almost anything can be turned into laughter if you have the right mood,” said Bill.

Linda says that laughter yoga’s informal and loose environment adds to the fun and keeps participants laughing and engaged. “We act like kids for the day. We breathe in health, and we breathe out whatever ails us.”

The Hamakers believe firmly in the positive effects of laughter yoga and have seen it demonstrated in their sessions. “I’ve seen a lot of people come in with symptoms that have disappeared,” said Linda. She said she has seen aches and pains dissipated and even recalled a participant whose side effects from a stroke had greatly diminished.

Though laughter yoga might sound silly, the Hamakers are committed to their craft. “It’s a major part of our life, and that’s why it works and why people come back,” Linda said. “Anything we do, we give our all.”

The most rewarding part, they said, is helping the people they work with. “You’re part of giving them a way to deal with all this stress,” said Bill. Linda echoed that sentiment. “Helping people is what we’re on earth for,” she said. “It’s about enjoying every moment and enjoying the little things.”

The Hamakers hold four monthly laughter sessions at their clubs in Westwood, Walpole, Sharon and Franklin. They are also available for private functions and leader training. For more information and a full schedule for their clubs, visit letslaughtertoday.com, or call 508-660-2223.



At top left, Bill and Linda Hamaker conduct one of their monthly meetings.

At bottom left, two laughter yoga participants enjoy a class exercise.

At bottom right, the Hamakers highlight some future events.

Photos courtesy of Bill and Linda Hamaker