

Relationship Advice: Can Humor Go Too Far?



By Dr. Jane Greer

Caustic comedian Don Rickles has recently [passed away](#). His true talent was in his ability to insult his audience and have them join in and laugh with him, rather than feeling laughed at by him. He had no qualms about going for people's vulnerabilities, whether they were short, bald, late, whatever it might be. His shows centered around those derisive comments about people's looks, their spouses, their jobs, their ethnicity – anything he could find to insult. He went right for the Achilles heel when targeting someone. Nothing was sacred, nothing was off limits. While so many fans were able to enjoy this unique brand of humor, others saw him as mean

spirited and potentially hurtful. There is no question that he had his own style and people either loved him or hated him.

This raises the question of what crosses the line in trying to be funny. How far is too far? Here's some relationship advice.

Many people act like Rickles and will use humor to say something "in jest" that they think is funny or maybe even as a way to express a true issue that is bothering them. How many times are you angry with your partner or spouse and say something mean spirited or devaluing? Often the disparaging thing is said in a joking manner, and is shared only when one or the other feels annoyed. When they are called out on it, they might say, "I was just kidding! Can't you take a joke?" While it might have been meant to be light, comments like that can often feel stunning and cause the other partner pain.

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Rickles worked long and hard to develop his style and craft to be able to push the boundaries and get away with truth under the banner of humor. In a relationship, however, whether it be a spouse, girlfriend or boyfriend, sister or a friend, if you think you are being funny and they aren't laughing then you might have gone too far. It's crucial to be aware of when your partner is actually upset or offended by a "joke" you made. If that happens, apologize. Always be open to communicating that you weren't looking to be hurtful, and if it still isn't coming across as funny, consider re-evaluating your choice of "humorous" comments. At the same time, think about what motivated your comment, are you actually upset about something that needs to be discussed directly with your partner? Along those lines, if you are the recipient of the "joke" it is

worth considering if there is some underlying annoyance or negative feeling your partner has toward you that is moving him or her to say these things. Either way, it would be good to have a conversation to check out if there is something under the surface that is going on that needs to be dealt with. When one of those comments is lobbed around your house, if it is unwelcome and unappreciated, seize the opportunity to work through whatever might be fueling it.

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Rickles was good at giving you the punch and the pain killer at the same time. If you went to his show you were basically giving your permission to be verbally attacked, if he saw fit. When you are in a relationship, people think they have permission to take a shot, but that is not always the case. Be aware of your partner's reactions, or speak up if you are feeling unfairly made fun of or ridiculed.

And remember, there really was only one Don Rickles.

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