

## Laugh — Englarluni

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### ENGLANEQ ASIRTUQ. – IT IS GOOD TO LAUGH.

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Little boy laughing. Alutiiq museum photograph.

Humor is an important form of communication. It relieves tension, helps people express their frustrations, and builds friendships. Alaska's Native societies are well known for their frequent laughter and abundant humor. From Alaska to Greenland, scolding, fighting, and displays of anger or aggression are considered extremely inappropriate, and difficult social situations are managed through avoidance and humor. The value of laughter is also expressed in joking partnerships. Among the Yup'ik and Iñupiaq people, these formalized friendships involved competition, horseplay, and exchanges of ribaldry.

Humor has a long and honored role in Alutiiq society. Elders continue to use humor in teaching Native history and ethics, and funny situations pervade traditional stories. Moreover, jokes, innuendos, and witty remarks are happily traded and greatly appreciated throughout daily life.

Humor was also part of traditional festivals. At these gatherings, women and girls dance in honor of deceased community members. Standing in tight lines, they crouched, swayed, and chanted rhythmically while men sang and beat drums. To lighten up these somber performances, old men in the audience would do everything possible to make the ladies smile or laugh. If they succeeded, the woman's husband or father had to give a gift to the old or the poor. Even the smallest smirk was an infraction worthy of a sealskin.