

Q&amp;A: JO GHASTLY

# AGAPE AND AGHAST

**J**oanna Prendergast, AKA Jo Ghastly moonlights from her day job as a psychiatrist to perform comedy shows *The Cool Mum* and *Cancer and Cartwheels*.

**Is your Cool Mum status generally accepted in your household?** My kids definitely think I'm a Cool Mum. I could tell by my son's facial expression, when I did 'the floss' while he was playing the video game Fortnite, that I was a truly Cool Mum. My daughter's friend taught me how to do the dab in 2016 and I have been doing it regularly for my kids and their friends ever since. **Can you tell us a bit about writing and performing your *Cancer and Cartwheels* show?**

Finding the humour in my cancer experience has been an important part of my coping with going through treatment. As a psychiatrist, I knew that humour was a great coping mechanism. I wasn't certain whether doing stand-up about cancer was going to down well though.

After my

first set, a young couple came up to me saying that they not only found it extremely funny, but also enlightening. Their positive feedback inspired me to keep writing my second show. I've called it *Cancer and Cartwheels*. Growing up, I was known as the 'cartwheel kid'. Cartwheels were my thing. I even did a cartwheel-a-thon for Telethon around 1981. I was shocked to find that I could no longer do a cartwheel when I tried around Christmas time. I'd recently finished chemotherapy and radiotherapy and my body was so stiff and painful that I felt like I was 90 years old. I pretty much fell on the ground. I decided that not only was I going to beat cancer, but I was also going to get back the ability to do a cartwheel. **What made you want to pick up the mic when you did?**

I first started doing stand-up comedy when I was 48 years old. I'd done a lot of

improvised comedy since early this century, both in Sydney and Christchurch. I also started acting in short films, feature films and a few TV roles. It was on a pilot of a TV series that a comedy producer suggested I try stand-up comedy. He was running a competition for first timers and so I decided to give that a go. I didn't win but I won by having conquered the fear of doing stand-up comedy. **What's your number one tip for parenting teenagers?** In my show *The Cool Mum*, I hide some real pieces of parenting advice amongst the jokes. The most important thing is that you don't need to be a perfect parent, just good enough. In fact trying to be a perfect parent can actually do more harm than good. Kids need the rupture and repair of their relationship with their parents to develop resilience to manage the big wide world. If parents are too perfect, then kids get a rude shock when they arrive in the world and life is no longer always easy for them. Every time there was drama and meltdowns with my own kids, I would say to myself, "it's the rupture and repair of relationship with their parents that builds resilience" and that helped me get through that episode.

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