PARENT ARTICLE

The surprising power of boredom, and why you are not the family entertainment officer

A practical read for parents learning to let empty space do its quiet, creative work.



THE IDEA TO REMEMBER

Boredom is not a parenting failure. It is the empty space where a child's imagination, independence and self-direction begin to wake up again.

When the screens finally go quiet in a house, a particular sound tends to follow. "I'm bored." It arrives within minutes, often with a sigh and a flop onto the sofa, and it feels to a parent like an accusation. Somewhere along the way, many of us came to believe that a bored child is evidence of a failure, a gap in the day that it is our job to rush in and fill.

I want to gently take that belief apart, because it is doing more harm than the boredom ever could.

Start with what boredom actually is. It is the uncomfortable, restless feeling of an unfilled mind. That uncomfortable, unfilled space is the exact condition in which a child's own imagination switches back on. It is so necessary and is not a problem at all. Boredom is the empty page on which invention is written. A child who is never bored is a child whose mind is never handed the silence it needs to start generating from within.

For most of human history, children were bored constantly, and out of that boredom came the whole secret world of childhood. There were games invented from nothing. We also built dens, made up stories and tackled the elaborate rules argued over in back gardens. Imagination is summoned by a little bit of nothing and the restless push to do something about it, far more than it is ever summoned by abundance. When we rush to fill every empty moment, with a screen or with our own frantic entertaining, we rob our children of the very thing boredom was about to produce.

This is where the screen does its quietest damage. It offers itself as the perfect cure for the empty moment, an instant, effortless escape from that restless feeling. A child therefore never

has to sit in the discomfort long enough for their own ideas to arrive. The boredom is solved before it can do its creative work. Over time, a child loses not only the practice of entertaining themselves, but the very belief that they can. They come to think of boredom as an emergency, because every time it appeared, something rushed in to end it.

Which brings me to the title, and to the role a parent needs to be released from. You are not the family entertainment officer. Your job is not to ensure your child is delightedly occupied at every hour. In fact, the harder you work at that job, the worse you make things, because a child entertained on demand is a child who never learns to do it for themselves. They simply transfer the expectation from the screen to you, and you become the next thing that must fill the silence. That is an exhausting and, frankly, impossible role to fill.

The far kinder thing, for both of you, is to let the boredom be. When the complaint comes, resist the strong pull to fix it. You can offer a couple of plain options and then, crucially, step back and let your child do the choosing and the doing. Some children will even try to convince you that their boredom is your fault and your emergency to solve. It is neither. Stay steady through the restless, grumbling middle, because that middle is exactly where their own ideas are quietly assembling themselves, just out of sight.

So here is the small thing to try, and it asks more of your nerve than your effort. The next time you hear "I'm bored," do nothing for a little while. Do not produce a screen, and do not leap into action yourself. Let the dull, restless space sit there unsolved. It will be uncomfortable, for them and probably for you. Stay out of it, and watch what happens on the other side. More often than you would expect, a child left alone with their boredom will, after a stretch of grumbling, wander off and begin to play.

That wandering off is the whole point. It is a mind, handed a little nothing, remembering how to make something of its own.

FROM THE BOOK

Learning to value boredom rather than fear it is the first move in the whole playbook, because everything else depends on a child who can be with themselves. In the book you will see how to stay steady through the noisy middle of it, and how that empty space becomes the doorway back to a richer, fuller life off the screen.

NEXT STEP

The next time your child says they are bored, wait before fixing it. Offer one or two plain options, then step back and let the quiet middle do its work.