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Boredom: A Childhood Staple?

As soon as your children can tell you how they feel, it happens. You hear the words that can make you roll your eyes, make you need to take a deep breath or might even make you lose your cool entirely...

I'm bored.

It can be said as soon as they wake up, in the midst of a vacation, the moment an event ends or just as you sit down for that coffee or glass of wine. As parents, regardless of *when* it is said, it causes a reaction in most of us. We can feel irritation, disbelief, dismay, anger, guilt and worry when we hear our children say those two little words. Why?



Boredom is a natural feeling but not one that is welcome. Merriam-Webster defines boredom as “the state of being weary and restless through lack of interest.” Hello...those are not words we want associated with our little wonders OR our parenting style. Weary? Restless? Lack of interest? Not what any of us are going for.

Maybe you've heard that boredom is good for kids. It helps them build resilience, gain independence, become more self-aware and flex their creativity muscles. This is all totally true. Being bored can be a good thing and allow for some amazing growth. But that doesn't make it *ANY* easier on parents and kids.

Your child will indeed, at some point, feel bored, restless and weary about their surroundings. They won't be happy with what is available to them, whether it's toys, activities or playmates. They will bemoan this feeling. They will repeat it (possibly excessively) and plead for you to fix it. They may nosedive into a full-blown tantrum over feeling bored. They may even cry *real, sad* tears.

As parents you will have all kinds of feelings over their reaction to boredom. We're not here to tell you how to feel or even how to react. We are here to tell you some ideas that may help your little one move through this boredom thing with a little more ease and a little less distress.

Quick Tips & Tricks to Manage Boredom:

- **Get ahead of it.** You know it is inevitable. Boredom will come. As your child grows and you get to know them as an individual, you will become aware of their rhythms. Just like you prepare for when you know boredom may strike (i.e. downloading shows to



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watch before a long flight or saving that podcast for a long commute), you will begin to know when the boredom may strike. Is it when dinner is being prepped? On a long car ride? Waiting at a restaurant? Think ahead and be ready. Talk about it ahead of time with your child. For some children, naming it and giving it a place in the day can help. "We may have to wait a while for our food at dinner. You may feel bored. Any ideas of what we could bring or do to help pass the time?" is an option. Naming it and getting ahead of it can really empower some children to keep things in check.

- **Have a "bag of tricks" ready.** Now, we don't advocate for parents to always be the source of boredom busting. That would set you up for frustration and burn-out. But, there are times when a boredom meltdown just won't work (i.e. you have a work Zoom that can't be missed, there's a long religious service that's a must, visiting a home with few toys or play options.) Have a bag at the ready for moments like these - nothing fancy but with items that are easy to play with and easy to clean-up. Think: legos, model magic, playdough, fruit squeeze pouches, playing cards, small animals, washi tape, small journal, stickers, board books. Consider items that get your child excited but also hold their interest.
- **When you can't beat the boredom, join the boredom.** Sometimes there's not much you can do but sit in the moment with your child and feel the feelings. Listen. Don't try to fix it or explain it away. Be in it and acknowledge that it stinks and is not fun. Get some fresh air for a few minutes or get a cool washcloth for your faces. Reset and start over. Boredom loves company.



If we can add anything about boredom and young children, it is that if you can find a way to tolerate it, boredom really can be of benefit to your child's development.

There is no sugar-coating it - parenting a child in the throes of boredom and the behaviors that come along with it, is not often easy. At Work & Play, we encourage parents to consider what their own comfort level is with boredom. Maybe a little whining and pouting is bearable but repetitive "I'm bored!" demands are not. We get it. Once you find your personal threshold, you can support your child through any boredom episode. You've got this!

At Work & Play our passion is in supporting parents so they can support their children. We problem solve, strategize and meet you right where you are because, most likely, we've been there at some point, too. We hope we'll get to know you soon.

Be sure to visit our website www.workandplayecc.com, reach out or check in on our [Instagram @workandplayecc](https://www.instagram.com/workandplayecc)! Reach out *anytime* at hello@workandplayecc.com.



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Boredom Buster Bonus Idea to Try:

Sensory play is a sure way to keep children busy and engaged. Many children love the freedom of playing in materials that offer lots of open-ended options. Boredom beware!

Washing Sensory Bin:

You'll Need:

- Container with sides (a large plastic bin or baking pan works great)
- Water (start with a small amount - you can always add more!)
- Waterproof toys (dolls, cars, play dishes are favorites)
- Sponges, small rags
- Tear-free bubble bath or soap
- Large towel (to put under the bin)

Pour some sudsy water in the bin, add the toys that you have on hand and invite your child to play.



Be sure to let them know that you are in charge of how much water they have and that the towel underneath is the only area for the play (giving a play boundary can be helpful if this a new experience!)

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