

# ENTERTAINING CHILDREN

No matter how long you have been parenting, everyone runs out of ideas for keeping little ones, or big ones, entertained. When your child cries, “I’m bored,” or “There’s nothing to do,” it is not always beneficial to run to their rescue with an activity you just learned of from the latest blog or news article. Science suggests there are some benefits to boredom, characterized by feelings of dissatisfaction, restlessness, and mental fatigue. Boredom is associated with self-control problems and an impulsive mindset (individuals who are always looking for new experiences). This may be why we hear, “I’m bored,” more from adolescents as this is the time when they are developing the skills needed to gain more self-control.

Boredom can actually improve mental health. The era of technology has created an overwhelming amount of information and distractions, which reduces attention. So, taking a break until the point of boredom can indicate an overloaded brain is relaxing. Boredom also increases creativity by providing an opportunity to reflect and spend time wandering and daydreaming. In one study, it was discovered that useful ideas tend to be revealed while performing simple tasks. This suggests that we think differently when we have fewer external stimulations. Along those lines, other research indicates that boredom creates an environment for new ideas and practices to grow. And finally, learning to endure boredom early in life is great preparation for developing self-control skills (regulating one’s thoughts, emotions, and actions).



However, if stress is high and you just need to get the complaining to stop, here are a few simple steps you can use to identify the activities your children will enjoy. Begin by making a list of your child’s favorite activities. Because every child is different, this can be presented as a challenge, which may help some children respond. It is important to write these ideas on paper, so in a time of “I’m bored,” you can have them revisit the list.

Next, encourage your children to arrange their favorite activities by category. This step may also inspire them to think of additional activities. Learning this process, also known as brainstorming, will be a useful skill for the rest of their lives, especially when they begin fourth-grade writing. For example, identify indoor versus outdoor activities (or per room for indoor), solo or with friends or siblings, activities by frequency (every day or special occasions) or seasons, etc.



Now that you have some ideas, plan the week just like planning meals. Come up with a daily theme that is unique for each day of the week. Have your child go back through the list they created to select the activities that excite them the most. See if a few will go together to fill an afternoon. Here is an example week:

**Move-well Monday** – Bundle up and get outside. Today is the day you go on a treasure hunt, bike ride, or explore nature during a walk through the woods. Go on a story walk and become the characters in the book. Are you pirates on the open sea searching for lost treasure or maybe a mermaid searching for the perfect rock on which to soak up the sun and sing a song? Circle back home for a book or nature show that explores and discovers the natural world.

**Tune Down Tuesday** – Stay in your pajamas all day (or as soon as you get home from work) for a reading or movie marathon. Picking the order of the

books or movies can be part of the fun. Use themes to help. Listening to music and sharing dance moves is also very pajama conducive. Naps are also encouraged!

**Worldwide Wednesday Olympics** – Spend the day coming up with indoor challenges for your living room Olympics. Don't cheat yourself: Be sure to include opening and closing ceremonies, medals, awards, or trophies. A couple all-time favorites are leg wrestling and the floor is lava.

**Theatrical Thursday** – Have your child(ren) write, direct, and star in a home video. Be sure to include costumes, background music, and guest appearances. Record the video on your cellphone and save this for future viewing, which is sure to be fun.

**Funday Friday** - It's time to break out the games! Identify your child's favorite games, from classic board games, card games, charades, tickle fights, pillow fights, and yes, even video games, and have a marathon. The winner of each game chooses the next game to play.

## OTHER POSSIBLE RESOURCES AND IDEAS FOR KEEPING CHILDREN BUSY:

- Indoor/outdoor scavenger hunts
- Online video dates with friends and family
- Make greeting cards for friends, family, or strangers
- Build forts inside or out. Allow siblings to have “sleepovers” or host “a home improvement show” to show off their sweet pad.
- Cooking or food prep with the kids.
- Involve kids with daily chores. A daily chore can help keep them organized and remind them of the importance of contributing.

## ONLINE FUN FOR DAYS YOU CAN'T GO OUTSIDE

- **PBS Kids** - On this colorful, animated site, kids can build a story, answer math problems, and make art.
- **Duck Moose** - Owned by the reputable Khan Academy, Duck Moose offers free, interactive iPad apps for the younger set. The apps encourage use of classic nursery rhymes and songs, counting, sorting, and many other interactive elements to encourage language, math, and art skill development. This site also has a number of printable worksheets for off-line play and learning.
- **GoNoodle** – Free online resource has more than 300 dance and yoga videos aimed at keeping kids active.
- **The Kennedy Center's Lunch Doodles with Mo Willems!** – Free online drawing sessions with the author and creator of the fun children's book series featuring Elephant and Piggie.



- **National Geographic Kids** - Through digital books, videos, and games, children can learn about topics like reducing their carbon footprint and preserving the habitats of their favorite animals. Nat Geo Kids also suggests nature-themed science experiments kids can try with things you probably already have at home. There are also quizzes and funny Mad Libs style fill-in-the-blank pages to keep the learning fun.
- **Khan Academy** - Khan Academy is a nonprofit organization offering math, science, arts, and humanities curricula, and even test prep courses for older students. You'll find classes on computing, finance, animation, and even social and emotional learning.
- **Duolingo** - This free language learning app and website offers instruction in 23 different languages - including Klingon!

- **Smithsonian Institution** - The Smithsonian offers a slew of online resources, including zoo animal cams, musical recordings, geography from space, meteorology, and more. Best of all, the site has plenty of games that give kids a fun and engaging way to experience art, science, and history topics.

So, the next time your child screams, “I’m bored,” you will be well prepared to challenge both their minds and their bodies through a plethora of activities that will be sure to spark their creativity and imagination.

## REFERENCES:

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