

A Word about Boredom

With the long structured school days behind them for the next two months, children have their sought after freedom from constant direction and the pressure of adult time schedules. After the initial newness of vacation wears off, cries of boredom may become a parent's latest undoing.

What happens to you when you hear, "I'm bored. What do I do?" after days and months of getting-out-the-door struggles and frustrated cries of, "I don't want to go to school." Is it tempting to say, "Aren't you ever happy? All year you complain that you never have any free time and now you do and you're bored." Do you feel resentful and come out with things like, "I'm not your social director. Figure it out for yourself."

What does it mean to feel bored? There is nothing that has to be done, nothing that is compelling you to act. You lack motivation and interest in the present moment, you may feel restless and agitated. Let's face it, for most of us, boredom brings us face-to-face with ourselves, which can allow space for any number of unpleasant feelings and realizations. We spend most our time making sure that doesn't happen. We add activity to activity, we become workaholics, we stay plugged into computers, iPods or cell phones, or we dull our senses with drugs, food, or video games. We make sure we never have to be alone with ourselves.

Boredom has a bad rep. Most of us think being bored means we're lazy, lethargic, inactive, selfish, dull, not taking responsibility for all that needs to be done. So when our children complain about being bored, we feel angry, irritated, and resentful because we see them in this same light, and may even feel at fault for not raising better worker bees. We slip right into thinking they are lazy, can't think for themselves, won't do anything on their own, can't come up with any number of things we can think of that they could or should be doing. When we define boredom this way, we logically feel frustrated or annoyed and thus react in any number of ways that put our children down, send messages of inadequacy, or simply express our impatience and irritation—a logical outcome when believing there is something wrong, misguided, and undirected about a child who feels bored.

But what if that's not the case? What if you thought how wonderful it was that your child has the opportunity to be bored? Think of the possibility in boredom. Isn't boredom a necessary precursor to creativity and invention? Think of what there is to be discovered in the depths of boredom. Inspiration needs emptiness to breed. It rarely comes out of constant doing. When a child feels inspired, accomplishment follows organically.

Meditation is the act of stilling the mind so the present moment can be experienced. Most of us don't stop long enough to be in the present moment, notice what is in front of our eyes or appreciate the sounds and smells and feelings of right now. In allowing boredom, you are granting the experience of the present moment—even if it's filled with frustration.

When you think you have to come up with activities or create some kind of stimulation for your child to keep her busy, you enable her dependence and are in fact sending a message that she is incapable of taking care of herself. By taking responsibility for filling her time, you interfere with her own creative process and ingenuity.

Imagine if your response to "I'm bored" is, "Oh, you are so lucky. What a great thing to feel bored. Amazing things are about to happen. You'll come up with something, I know. When you do, let me know. I'll be interested to hear what that mind of yours invents." Think what you are setting in motion! Think what message that sends to a frustrated child. The frustration will morph into something quite different. Maybe not immediately, but soon enough.

Unfortunately, many children will still have little time to be bored if they continue in structured care throughout the year. And with technology ever present, children have little opportunity to be bored. All the more reason to set parameters around screen time from an early age so that video games and texting are not the only fillers when there is nothing else to do.

Try spending time doing nothing with your child. Try, "I really want to do absolutely nothing right now. Will you do nothing with me?" Then go sit on the porch or cuddle on the couch and just be. Focus on what you can observe right then. There might be a

bird neither of you would have otherwise noticed or bugs in the grass that inspire wondering. Let your child know how wonderful it can be to be bored—oh, the possibilities. Boredom is a luxury of childhood. Make sure it is allowed on a regular basis.