

What kids are really saying when you hear 'I'm bored'

Summer is only half over, but my kids are driving me crazy with "I'm bored." Whenever I suggest something, it's not good enough. Any ideas?

Nearly every parent can relate. From "I'm bored" to "There's nothing to do," both young children and adolescents often seem stymied regarding what to do with their free, unstructured time. And in response, parents often launch into a litany of grand, exciting, adventurous ideas, including "You could clean your room," or "Why not help me fold the laundry?" -- an approach that might make the problem go underground but usually doesn't result in solving the boredom challenge (or in completing household chores).

Child development specialists suggest a different approach. First, take a step back: What's behind the grumbling? It could be that your children aren't exactly bored; it could be that they are yearning for more structure, more involvement and more interaction with you, with friends or with anyone. If you respond to "I'm bored" with criticism or indifference, you may be missing an opportunity.

The next time this happens, you might try a new approach that focuses on talking with your children about ideas that would provide them with companionship, reassurance, and a more predictable routine, and help them feel productive in the process.



Knowing your children's interests is key. It could take some time and conversation to help identify those interests, and then, together, to come up with ideas surrounding those interests. To help you get started, here are a few ideas:

- Are your children interested in any pressing social or environmental issues? Write to your congressional representatives, senators, and even the president. You can find addresses and e-mail addresses at <http://www.firstgov.gov>. The president's email is president@whitehouse.gov, or you can send your letter the old-fashioned way to 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20500.

- Do you have the time and budget to plan a weekend getaway this summer? If so, in Ohio, you can help your children explore local opportunities at <http://www.ohiotourism.com>, or by calling 1-800-BUCKEYE and asking for a packet of materials to be mailed to you. Then get a map of Ohio and trace the route of your trip, and let your children help plan the budget.

- Get a calendar and write all of your family members' and friends' birthdays on it. Then make homemade birthday cards for everyone, and decorate a box to store the cards in until they're needed.

Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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