

Chapter 9:

“Mum, I’m bored!”



Recipe rescue:

clever ideas to deal with kid's boredom

Ingredients:

- A child calling, “Mum, I’m bored”
- A child who expects mum or dad to fix their boredom
- A parent who jumps into action because they think their job is to be their children’s entertainment director
- A spoilt child who gets whatever they want
- A child with poor independent skills, a short concentration span and pushes to be on the go
- A parent tired of finding things to keep the kids busy
- A parent who complains, but secretly feels fulfilled by the act of amusing their children

The scenario...

“Mum, I’m bored”

It’s Saturday morning. The kids woke early so we stuck them in front of television. Our hope was to grab a few moments back in bed and read the paper with a coffee. Two minutes after jumping back into bed, our ten year old son yells, “This is boring. I’m going on the Xbox to play my new game.” He knows Xbox times are restricted and that I regret buying him this latest game - it’s too violent and he’s already addicted! I call out, “No, leave the Xbox alone. Go and do something else.”

*“There isn’t anything else to do....
“Mum, I’m bored.”*

My heart sinks. Boredom would be a luxury for me! In the few remaining moments I have left in bed,

I contemplate what, “Mum, I’m bored” really means. Does it mean, “I’m too lazy to do anything except complain” “Give me your undivided attention” “You do the thinking for me” or, “Come on keep me entertained.”

Would I be better off ignoring him or responding with something like;

*“You’re bored because you’re boring.”
“That’s because you’re tired. Go back to sleep.”*

“Well, now’s the time to catch up on that homework”

“Hey, here’s a damp cloth, go to the lounge and dust the skirting boards”



Is it wrong for kids to feel bored?

How can kids today possibly be bored? They’ve got everything imaginable to amuse them. They have unlimited entertainment available - free to air TV, pay TV, smartphones, wii, Xbox, Nintendo 3DS, iPads, iPods, Surface

and thousands of inexpensive games from the internet ready for immediate download! What’s more, they have toys we could have only imagined as kids - Lego, Lego robotics, motorised scooters, kick scooters, skateboards,

bikes, remote controlled cars, trucks, helicopters and planes and so on and so on. Yet our kids still come to us and say they’re bored. What if we were to raise a few thoughts at this point?

- ✓ *There’s nothing wrong with being bored sometimes.*
- ✓ *Boredom is a very normal human emotion as genuine as happiness or sadness - it has its place.*
- ✓ *We have to learn to deal with boredom, just as we learn to deal with other emotions.*
- ✓ *Boredom is a valuable teacher - it helps us to learn to be by ourselves, to ponder, imagine and even reconstruct past experiences in order to build better futures.*
- ✓ *“Mum, I’m bored” means many things, such as - “I feel tired”, “Let me play on the computer”, “Can I go to the movies” or “I don’t feel like doing much at the moment.”*
- ✓ *Your child’s boredom can sometimes be an invitation for you to connect with them.*

Funnily enough there’s also a line of thought where some parents see kids’ boredom as a ‘crime’. Consequently, “Mum, I’m bored” is sarcastically countered with, “Then go sweep the kitchen,” or “I wish I was lucky enough to

feel bored” or “You can’t be bored. You have hundreds of toys” or “Suck it up, princess!” We propose that the tradition of dismissing kids or belittling kids when they say they’re bored deserves a second thought. We believe children

and young teens deserve a thoughtful and respectful response. If you’re ready for this, then you’ll enjoy our Recipe rescue. It encourages healthier ways to think about your children’s boredom, and what to do with it.



Recipe rescue:

clever ideas to deal with kid’s boredom

If “Mum, I’m bored” drives you mad then it’s time to review the role you play in this.

All those extracurricular activities may be lowering your child’s boredom tolerance

Most of us try hard to keep our kids busily engaged in extra activities outside of school to meet their aspirations, interests and talents. It’s what we do as parents. We’re driven to give them the best opportunities we can, and there’s nothing wrong with wanting to give them the best.

But, what is best? Does the fact that many of us deliver a smorgasbord of entertainment impact on how our kids respond to the quieter times in their lives? None of us want to be accused of hothouse-styled parenting, but one can’t help wonder whether the intensity we apply to our kid’s extracurricular activities is stealing some of the joys of childhood - downtime, day-dream time, alone time and having time to mooch, muse and create. The truth is that our kid’s lives don’t always have to be full, busy and striving. Running our kids ragged with full-time extracurricular activities won’t make their childhoods better. If anything, it may very well work to lower their boredom tolerance.



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Screen ‘addiction’ and boredom

If you think your child has too much ‘screen time’ and seems to be pushing for more, then think about the role you’re playing in this. Things tend not to happen in isolation - are you a gamer, an avid facebooker, a compulsive tweeter, a phone addict, or worse still, behave like a ‘screen time’ Nazi? Yes, a child’s push for more and more screen time is directly related to our own habits and attitudes, and how we use and feel about them. Most of us would admit in the privacy of this moment that we’re guilty of using screens as babysitters way too often. After all, screens are a handy way to keep squabbling kids separate, to keep them amused, or to give the family respite from a difficult kid. If you think your kids have too much ‘screen time’ begin the winds of change by modelling healthy behaviour yourself. As of today, invent a new term called, “screen rubbish”. This term describes the difference between screens that have some kind of an intellectual or educational bias, compared to fast trigger entertainment! Secondly, develop some sensible family ‘screen time’ rules. Health experts warn us it’s best not to expose children under the age of 3 years to screens at all! The sensible thinking is to increase ‘screen time’ very, very gradually to a maximum of 2 hours per day for 12 year olds.

‘Screen time’ always needs to be earned, always broken up into thirty minute portions, always located in a shared space and always switched off an hour before going to sleep. We’re not saying it’s easy. And, we beg you not to become a blatant ‘Screen Nazi’.

Kids stick close to forbidden fruit. When they know we distrust and dislike what they love, we actually drive them to it. The impact of technology on us is truly brave new world stuff! Our brains have never been subjected to the amount of cognitive input that’s coming at us, and you can’t switch off the world. All you can do is educate yourself, along with your children, to manage this better.

who are constantly plugged in become used to a ‘screen time’ reward pattern that’s more enticing than what they experience in the real world.

The consequence of screen addiction sees people of all ages finding it difficult to tolerate any ‘down time’. Real life gradually takes on an understimulating and under-whelming feel



We see too many children with unlimited access to all kinds of ‘screens’. The result is nothing short of screen addiction. But, why would anyone be surprised? Online and screen mediums bombard the brain with super visual and auditory stimuli. It is so powerful that while engaged, our brains set up a tantalizing positive feedback loop. Even supposedly simple acts as receiving a text message are considered rewards by the brain - yes, like a hit from a drug - and of course, more is better! Kids

when compared to virtual world. So, what do they do? You’ve seen them. You may even do it yourself. They reach for their smartphones or gadgets the moment they are not directly engaged in a conversation, while they’re walking, shopping, at the checkout, as soon as they’re waiting at the bus stop, when driving or even while sitting on the toilet! There is no room for ‘down time’ in their lives anymore; they have rewired their brains so the scope for healthy boredom no longer exists.

If you think your kids have too much ‘screen time’ begin the winds of change by modelling healthy behaviour yourself....

Yes, a child’s push for more and more screen time is directly related to our own habits and attitudes, and how we use and feel about them.

Let’s rethink, “Mum, I’m bored”

The word bored is ambiguous. It can mean different things to different kids at different times - recognise this and tune into it. We need to be clever translators.

So from now on, when you hear “Mum, I’m bored” ask your child;

- What made you bored?
- Being bored is okay. You know that don’t you?
- It’s an odd feeling, isn’t it? Got any ideas?
- Are you okay to just hang around for a while?
- That’s just your clever brain sorting out how to do something more quietly. It will come up with something to do. Let me know when it does, okay?

At home: “Mum, I’m bored” could mean;

- I want to spend some time with you
- I need you to tell me what I should do
- I don’t like what I’m doing right now
- I feel sick
- I want to do something that I know you won’t really agree to
- I want to go on the computer to play my game
- I want you to organise something that I’ll enjoy
- I’m just at a loose end

About school: “Mum, I’m bored” could mean;

- I want to spend some time with you
- The work is too hard
- The work is too easy
- I haven’t had enough sleep and I’m tired
- The day is too long
- I can’t read or write like the others
- I haven’t got friends
- Kids are being mean to me
- I’m not getting my way
- My teacher screams or is bossy

What to do when your child says, “Mum, I’m bored”

Is it our job to always relieve our kid’s boredom? Of course not! Our call to duty is to be shrewd and invent systems with our kids so that when boredom crops up, there are appetizing options they’re attracted to. One idea is to get busy and generate a short list of ‘Things to do when I feel bored’. Develop a wall chart and display it in a conspicuous position. Divide the chart into two columns. One column for the things kids can ‘do alone’ and the other for things the kids can ‘do with each other’. Try not to overwhelm kids with too many choices. Instead, have just 5 delicious choices in each column and be prepared to update the list every three months or so.

Alternatively, make a ‘Boredom-dare jar’.

To do this get a large plastic jar or cheap goldfish bowl. Then fill it with a host of activities, challenges and dares - each one written on a folded sheet of paper. You’ve got the idea, this is lucky dip style for the kids - some of the

activities are fun, some will demand the kids entertain you, some will have you entertaining them, some will deliver an unexpected delight, others will ask them to do a chore, something challenging or something bizarre.



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To get you off to a great start here’s some fabulous boredom antidotes. These ideas are not meant to be an overwhelming dump of ideas. See them as delightful choices and only choose a few at a time that you know will appeal. These choices then become the focus when the kids are feeling bored. Oh, you’ll notice that we haven’t included anything to do with ‘screens’. That’s deliberate because ‘screens’ tend to happen anyway! Enjoy;

“Mum, I’m bored!” IDEAS:

1. Go and play netball, basketball, soccer, football, cricket, tennis or practice any sporting skill
2. Set up a beep test, pull out your score card and try to improve on previous times
3. Go practice your instrument - piano, drums, guitar, etc.
4. Listen to music, write a playlist for bored moments
5. Build a tent in the backyard ready to camp out later on
6. Go jump on the trampoline - it’s a great way to positively change mood states!
7. Read a book, a comic or a magazine
8. Write a story and make a book or a comic from it
9. Build a marble run or a fabulous domino run - then let them fall
10. Do a colouring-in or paint by number activity
11. Do some mazes from a giant maze book or make your own mazes for others to solve later on
12. Get the bowling pins out and start a bowling competition with yourself or with others
13. Take a long, long bubble bath and cut your toenails and fingernails
14. Create and practice a puppet show to show to the family later on
15. Film yourself acting something from a book, talking with your pets, singing a song or making a documentary. Show it to everyone later. Keep a file of these as part of family records
16. Make a card or write a letter to a friend or family member
17. Go take some great photos
18. Use duct tape and cardboard boxes to build something
19. Have fun blowing bubbles
20. Make something with clay, plasticine or play-doh
21. Play cards - Go Fish, Solitaire, Old Maid, Snap, Concentration or War
22. Build a house of cards and set a record for height or cards used for next time
23. Phone a friend or a relative and talk
24. Count the money in your moneybox
25. Go and look under the seats in the house and in the car for coins - make sure you plant a few!
26. Get outside and catch a little critter. Research it and build it a habitat for it
27. Go and get the skipping rope and skip and skip and skip
28. Paint or finger-paint. Never forget shaving cream on coloured paper!
29. Design place mats for each person for the dinner table
30. Design a treasure hunt for the family for later
31. Play hide and seek
32. Build a commando course and set it up for everyone to use later
33. Have fun playing in the sprinkler
34. Target practice using ‘nerf guns’ or similar
35. Draw on the path with chalk
36. Organise and have a picnic in the backyard
37. Take the dog for a walk
38. Do a puzzle or board game - Carcassonne for Kids, Go Nuts! Scrabble, Magic Labyrinth, Minotaurus Ring-O Flamingo, Chutes and Ladders, Candyland, Pay Day, Trouble, Sorry, Monopoly, etc.
39. Throw a Frisbee
40. Cut out paper snowflakes, paper designs or paper dolls
41. Face paint each other or do it to yourself in the mirror
42. Play hangman
43. Check out insects with a magnifying glass
44. Ask mum or dad if you can do a job around the house for money or to surprise them
45. Go ride your rollerblades, skates, skateboard or your bike
46. Get the Lego out and start building!
47. Re-organise a bit of your bedroom

“Mum, I’m bored!” IDEAS:

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| <p>48. Give the dog a bath</p> <p>49. Water the vegetable garden or plant some new ones</p> <p>50. Open up a packet of balloons; play air soccer or fill them up with water ready for a balloon fight</p> <p>51. Get building with bits of wood, a hammer and nails</p> <p>52. Squeeze some oranges or lemons and set up a shop at the front of your house with advertising</p> | <p>53. Have a funny face competition. Make funny faces and photograph the best faces!</p> <p>54. Get out the dress ups, dress up and photograph the best ready to show everyone later</p> <p>55. Carve a small boat from balsa wood and see if it floats. How much can it carry?</p> <p>56. http://www.asg.com.au/Assets/Files/ASGPRMDIB2012.pdf</p> <p>57. http://pinterest.com/mkandel/mom-i-m-bored/</p> |
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Next time you hear your child shriek, “Mum, I’m bored” try to remember when you were their age. Can you recall thinking, “I don’t know what to” or “I haven’t got anyone to play with” or “What could I do in this house, on a day like this?” but the words that flew out of your mouth were, “Mum, I’m bored”. In reality you were at a loose end. There were probably a lot of things you could have done, but needed a kick start to engage in something.

We think it’s best to develop a simple, but ever evolving ‘anti-boredom plan’ together. In this way, the kids can use their bored feeling as a motivation to attach to another activity. It is a matter of helping them take the first step away from boredom - into engagement while everyone keeps their dignity. It’s also a way to set up new habits.

As well, there are a few basic guidelines to keep in mind. First, it is natural for younger children to have shorter concentration spans, be more impulsive

and rely on others for their stimulation. Secondly, some children need to be taught ‘how-to engage in tasks’. This begins with us modelling how we engage, stick with enjoy, and finish tasks. Yes, our kids watch our every move so never discount the power of role-modelling how you engage and get pleasure from simple activities. Finally, when you have the time, start your kids off on an activity with you playing as well. Gently guide and coach them how to play, how to enjoy and how to be absorbed in something.

