

Mrs Dowdell's Parenting Pointers

I'm bored

How do we react when our children tell us they're bored? We may feel put on the spot, we might even feel like a bad parent, most of us feel pressured to solve this "problem" right away. We often respond by providing technological entertainment or structured activities but that can be counter-productive. Children need to encounter and engage with the raw stuff that life is made of: unstructured time. Here are some thoughts ...

One of our biggest challenges as adults can be learning to manage our time well. So it's essential for children to have the experience of deciding for themselves how to use unstructured time, or they'll never learn to manage it. Unstructured time gives children the opportunity to explore their inner and outer worlds, which is the beginning of creativity. This is how they learn to engage with themselves and the world, to imagine and invent and create. If we keep them busy with lessons and activities, or they fill their time with screen entertainment, they never learn to think creatively. If we equip them with the confidence to solve the problem of how to fill their time, it might lead them to build a den in the front room, make a monster from playdough, write a short story or song, or study the bugs in the garden (as Einstein reportedly did for hours).

There may be a number of reasons why our children struggle to find something to do. Maybe, they're so used to screen entertainment that they've forgotten how to play. Perhaps their time is always so structured that they aren't used to finding fun things to do with their free time. Sometimes they may be telling us that they need some parental attention to refuel them emotionally. Perhaps they just need the freedom to know that they can choose for themselves how they spend a portion of their time and not expect us to always come to their rescue.



So when they say "I'm bored" how can we respond? First, we need to stop what we're doing and really focus on our child, just chat and connect and they may get the refuelling they need fairly quickly. If they seem to need longer, we can offer to involve them in what we're doing, or take a break from our work to do something together. Once we're confident that our child has a full "love tank," we can revisit the "what to do" question. They may have some ideas for something they'd like to do. If not, it's OK to tell them that figuring out how to enjoy their own time is their job. We can shift the responsibility to our child, by working with them to create a Boredom Buster Jar. Write down ideas that would be fun to do and put them in the Boredom Buster Jar. Whenever they say they're bored, they can pick three pieces of paper from the jar and choose one of the activities.

Remember, when they say they're bored, we are not being bad parents, we are giving them opportunities to be creative and to learn how to use their time and let's face it, we can all get better at that!

To get in touch, you can email me at parenting@foundrylanprimary.co.uk

