

A photograph of three children running happily in a grassy field. A girl in the center is wearing denim overalls, and a boy on the right is wearing a striped shirt. The background is a bright, sunny outdoor setting with trees.

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# KNOW! HEALTHY WAYS TO MANAGE BOREDOM

During school breaks or weekends, you might hear the familiar complaint: “I’m bored.” Boredom naturally happens when our brains aren’t actively engaged, and without school or structured activities, keeping kids entertained can feel like a challenge, especially when social media makes it seem like everyone else is constantly busy with exciting plans.

But here’s the good news: boredom isn’t a bad thing! In fact, it’s an important part of childhood. When kids have unstructured time, they develop crucial life skills like problem-solving, emotional regulation, frustration tolerance, creativity, flexibility, and independence—things they might not practice in a highly scheduled routine.

If kids immediately turn to screens or rely on adults to entertain them, they miss out on the chance to build these skills. Instead of trying to eliminate boredom, your role as a caring adult is to help them discover ways to manage it on their own.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Use this guide to support kids in turning boredom into an opportunity for growth and creativity!

## BUILD AN ACTIVITY MENU

Sit down with your child and talk about what they enjoy doing and what sounds fun to them. Together, create a list of activities based on their past favorites and current interests. Be sure to include a mix of activities that vary in length—some quick and simple, like coloring or playing a board game, and others that take more time, like practicing a sport or reading a novel.

To make the activity menu more engaging, turn it into a visual resource that your child can easily see and use. Write it on a colorful chart, a whiteboard, or even create activity cards they can pick from. For younger children, adding pictures can help them navigate their options more independently. The next time your child tells you they’re bored, you can direct them to the menu you created together to choose an activity.<sup>1,2</sup>

## SCHEDULE UNSTRUCTURED TIME

Whether your day is filled with planned activities or has plenty of open time, let your child know in advance when they’ll have unstructured time. Explain that during this period, they’ll be encouraged to choose activities from their activity menu and explore their own interests. To set them up for success, make sure materials are easily accessible and offer guidance if they need help getting started.<sup>2,3</sup>

## HELP THEM GET STARTED

Some kids may need a little help getting started with their independent activities. Instead of giving them direct instructions, ask open-ended questions to spark their creativity, such as:

- “What are you going to make?”
- “What do you need to get started?”
- “What steps will you take to do this?”

These prompts encourage kids to think critically and take ownership of their play. You can also inspire creativity by mixing up toys that don’t usually go together, introducing new materials, or even handing them something as simple as a cardboard box—sometimes, the simplest things spark the most imaginative play.<sup>1,2</sup>

## BE PATIENT

It's natural for kids to feel frustrated when they have to come up with their own activities. They might look to you to entertain them instead of figuring out how to play independently.

Rather than immediately stepping in with a solution, be patient and give them gentle guidance. Offer a choice between two activities to help them get started but resist the urge to take over. If they're seeking your attention, let them know when you'll be available to spend time with them. This reassures them that their needs will be met, just not at that exact moment. Over time, they'll grow more comfortable managing boredom on their own.<sup>1,3</sup>

## EMBRACE FAILURE

Not every activity will go as planned, and that's okay! When a project doesn't turn out the way your child hoped, use it as a learning opportunity rather than a setback. Encourage them to reflect by asking:

- "What worked well?"
- "What didn't go as expected?"
- "What do you want to try differently next time?"

By helping kids reframe failure as a chance to learn and improve, you're teaching them resilience, frustration tolerance, and perseverance—skills that will benefit them far beyond playtime.<sup>1</sup>

## SHOW YOUR INTEREST

When your child successfully engages in unstructured play, take a moment to acknowledge and celebrate their independence. Let them know you're proud of them for finding something to do on their own. Ask questions like:

- "How did you come up with that idea?"
- "What was your favorite part of what you made or did?"
- "Would you do anything differently next time?"

By showing genuine interest and encouragement, you help kids see boredom as an opportunity for creativity, exploration, and skill-building. Over time, they'll feel more confident tackling unstructured time on their own.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

## BE AVAILABLE

Sometimes, when kids say they're bored, what they really need is connection. They may be looking for attention and reassurance from the adults in their life—and that's completely normal! Feeling loved and valued is essential for their emotional well-being.

Make it a priority to spend quality time with your child, whether it's through conversation, play, or shared activities. When kids know they have your attention and support, they'll feel more secure exploring independent play and self-directed activities.<sup>2</sup>

## KNOW WHEN TO BE CONCERNED

Boredom is normal for both kids and adults, but persistent boredom or a lack of interest in activities could be a sign of something deeper. If your child frequently seems disengaged or uninterested in things they once enjoyed, take a moment to check in and ask how they're feeling.

If their disinterest continues for an extended period, consider reaching out to a teacher, school counselor, or pediatrician for guidance. Recognizing these signs early can help ensure your child gets the support they need to thrive.<sup>3</sup>

## RESOURCES

[100 Fun Activities for Kids Who Are "So Bored" | Milwaukee With Kids](#)

[Unstructured Time Ideas | Kids Mental Health Foundation](#)

[Your Guide to Managing Indoor Boredom | Kids Mental Health Foundation](#)



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