



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Supported Drug-Free Community Coalition
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ARTICLE 29 – October 1, 2008 – Dealing with Childhood Boredom

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“I’m bored!” “There’s nothing to do!” Every parent whose child has mastered basic speech has heard it a thousand times. My son once told a friend not to say it at our house or I may assign chores. Not always, but I do think kids are asking for guidance by saying “I’m bored.” We have to read between the lines to help them figure out what to do next.

To an extent, that search for what to do next with their time is one that kids can and should undertake on their own. It’s our job as parents to teach them to think independently. That’s hard for them to do with a TV remote or a video game controller in their hand.

When they were younger, my boys had limits on TV and video game time. When they boys were young (the preschool and early elementary years) we limited them to about an hour on weekdays and two hours on the weekends. As they’ve grown older our system has evolved into one that is largely built on self-monitoring. Our thirteen-year-old is very athletic and likes to move around a lot, so he grows tired of sedentary screen time fairly quickly. His ten-year-old brother, a self-described “video game addict” requires a little more prodding to put down the controller or remote, but after an hour or so we prod away.

But whether they’ve been prodded or turned it off themselves, “I’m bored” is often the next phrase to pass their lips. A common refrain of mine, particularly when they were younger and had gobs of toys, was simply “look around you!” I used to threaten to donate items to charity if they weren’t adequate to quell the boredom. An abundance of toys is hardly an issue with teens, but I still encourage mine to invent things to do.

Late this spring, after a school field trip to clean up Slab Cabin Park, my ten year old had a classmate over to play. They rode their bikes to Slab Cabin and came back hours later with tales of splashing in the creek and a few relocated tadpoles. The next time, my thirteen-year-old joined them with a few friends and for weeks the favored activity was riding over to Slab Cabin. Three months later, he has purchased two enormous fish tanks and a turtle tank for his bedroom. We spent many days and evenings at local pet shops where he learned about caring for the fish, turtles and frogs he bought, and even more days at Slab Cabin, Whipple Dam and Spring Creek Park doing “research.” Boring? Not so much.

Of course, sometimes you have to guide (drag?) kids into activities as well. I made a list for my kids at the beginning of the summer and told them to choose one if they professed boredom or the umpteenth hour in front of the TV/game system that day was looming. The Summer List took them to local public pools, parks, dog parks, go-cart tracks, matinee movies (cheaper than evening shows) and even a little shopping. A few things on the List remain untapped . . . geo-cacheing, anyone?

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