

Beating Boredom

How to put the happy in your kids' holidays.



AS NOVEMBER SLIDES into December, a raft of religious and cultural celebrations await, including Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa and the International Day of Boredom. OK, boredom doesn't have its own holiday, but maybe it should. After all, it's the rare kid who doesn't complain about being bored during long breaks from school.

So what should you do when you hear "I'm bored"? To find out, *Scouting* talked with two experts: Josh Glenn, co-author of *Unbored: The Essential Field Guide to Serious Fun* (Bloomsbury USA, 2012) and Jean Van't Hul, author of *The Artful Parent: Simple Ways to Fill Your Family's Life with Art & Creativity* (Roost Books, 2013) and host of the Artful Parent blog (artfulparent.com).

A Little Boredom Is OK

Van't Hul and Glenn come at the boredom problem from slightly different perspectives — she's artsy; he's eclectic — but they agree on one thing: Boredom is not all bad. "If you just let kids be bored for a little bit, they will soon find their own groove and may be more likely to use their imagination and get creative," Van't Hul says. In fact, Glenn says, "Boredom is the seed ground for awesome, imaginative, creative play. It's OK as long as you're also helping build the resources so they can unbore themselves."

Preparation Is Essential

Providing resources means planning ahead. Instead of waiting for boredom to strike, stock up on ideas, activities

and art supplies. Van't Hul recommends starting with some basic art supplies — paint, markers and paper — and adding some fun items like googly eyes and feathers. "It doesn't have to be expensive at all," she says. "There is lots of art that can be done with things you have around the house." Among her favorites: homemade play dough, which uses simple ingredients like flour and salt. Just be sure to research recipes ahead of time.

Glenn, meanwhile, recommends "curating" your kids' closets and shelves. Before the holidays hit, go through their books, games and toys, putting away things they're tired of and pulling out things that might interest them now. "It's kind of like being a librarian," he says. "You want to set out a very attractive array of things and have the kids find their way to them, instead of forcing them on the kids."

The Journey Is the Reward

While some boredom-busters can be educational, pure fun is OK, too. Even when his two sons were approaching their teen years, Glenn held on to games and picture books they'd enjoyed years earlier. "No matter how old you get, you still like to look at the things you enjoyed when you were younger," he says. (He did balance those little-kid attractions with books and games that would cause his boys to stretch a bit.)

With art projects, Van't Hul recommends focusing on the process, not the product. In other words, don't



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emulate her grade-school teachers. "They wanted us to re-create something that they'd created: put the eyes here, cut the beard out exactly this way, following along the dotted lines — that sort of thing," she says. "That's not what I consider art."

Life Is a Game

Van't Hul says group art games can be great winter-break activities, especially when friends and relatives are visiting. A simple example is Combination Man, in which players around a circle collaborate on a drawing, taking turns adding one body part to a figure.

Also, don't feel constrained by the rules. Glenn is a big fan of game hacking, in which you create new rules for old games, sometimes with hilarious results. He says the invitation to your kids can be as simple as this: "This game is one we're not

playing anymore. We've lost some of the pieces, and we don't really like it anymore. Let's try to find a way to make it more fun."

Screens Aren't (Necessarily) the Enemy

Over long school breaks, many parents despair of the time their kids spend watching TV, playing video-games or texting. While you could try to make your home a technology-free zone, you can also help your kids find productive ways to use electronic gadgets.

For example, Glenn's sons enjoy making mashups of songs, something they started doing early on. "When they were younger and wanted to listen to hip-hop, I would say, 'OK, as long as you delete the swears,'" he explains.

He and his sons also enjoy the social-media app Foursquare, which

rewards users for checking in at businesses and cultural attractions. For example, if he and one son are killing time during the other son's guitar lesson, they'll explore the neighborhood, checking in on Foursquare to rack up points and compete with their friends. (Just check the age requirements before you sign up or let your kids use your account.)

Fun Is a Team Sport

Finally, make time to do activities with your kids. While they occasionally need their own space, they also crave interaction with you. "Up to the age of 8 or so, there's a million books and websites and magazines and TV shows about things that parents and kids can do together," Glenn says. "As soon as your kid is in fourth or fifth grade, that's the end of it. This sort of disconnect starts to grow. There's no reason for that to happen." ♦



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