



ParentingNI  
Supporting Families

“I’m Bored”:  
Parents’ Guide to  
Beating Summer  
Boredom

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## “I’m Bored” - Advice for Parents whose children complain of being Bored

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“I’m bored” is a familiar statement. Most parents will be well acquainted with this phrase, and over the summer months it can form a particularly large part of any child’s vocabulary. There are few things that can irritate a parent (who is already stressed from the lack of school) more than a child announcing that they are bored. This article will look at the science of boredom – and why some people say it is “good to be bored”. It will also give tips, tricks and advice for dealing with summer boredom.

Boredom is a natural phenomenon. Everyone, at some point in their lives experiences boredom. For most people, most of the time it is a negative experience. There is no agreed scientific definition of boredom, but it has been described as ‘feeling stressed, agitated, and yet at the same time lethargic’ (Martin et al. 2006). As such, it is easy to understand why children can be so desperate for someone to alleviate their boredom – it is a sensation that younger children might find distressing. If they have not yet developed the skills to entertain themselves, the mounting stress of feeling bored and restlessness could cause them to feel overwhelmed.

However, there is some evidence that boredom serves a purpose. Author Neel Burton (2014) suggests that the feeling of boredom can also be your way of telling yourself that you’re not spending your time as well as you could, that you should rather be doing something else, something more enjoyable or more useful, or more important and fulfilling. Therefore, if your children are never allowed to be bored, it may make it difficult for them to understand what is or is not a good use of time.

Sandi Mann (2019), a lecturer at the University of Central Lancashire has done significant research into the science of boredom. She suggests that boredom can:

- Improve your creativity. Studies found that people who were asked to complete a boring task (writing down phone numbers, counting beans or the like) performed better in a creative task immediately after;
- Boredom can actually be good for your mental health. It acts as a “pause” from the stresses of over stimulation which are common in the digital world.

Experiencing – and overcoming – boredom is particularly important for children’s development. Dr Sharie Coombes, a child and family psychologist (Harvey, 2018) suggests that boredom is central in children determining who they are, as opposed to who their parents perceive them to be. Being bored forces them to be creative, problem solve and allows them to take pride in the accomplishment. These children will then be more resilient, less reliant on others for entertainment and better at self-soothing.

### Dealing with boredom

There is a fine balance to be struck when dealing with summer boredom. While it is important to offer children the chance to explore unstructured play, and to let them figure out what they like to do, it can also be good to assist them. Parenting NI recently asked parents on our social media for ideas of what to do with children when they are bored over the summer holidays:

## Rainy Day/Sunny Day Boxes

Nothing is more frustrating – and boring – for a child than an otherwise perfect day to play outside being ruined by typically poor weather. Whether it is a miserable, drizzly Saturday or a downpour on the first day of summer, an unhelpful climate can put paid to best laid plans.

A “Rainy Day/Sunny Day” box is one way to beat the weather. Additionally, it is an opportunity for you and your child to spend time being creative together. Simply sit down together, and come up with a list of ideas of what to do on a:

- Sunny day: Play outside, make a den/fort, go for a walk or cycle
- Rainy day: Play a board game, scavenger hunts inside, baking/cooking together

Try to come up with as long a list as possible. These don't have to be expensive – try to make use of whatever you already have. Then, when your child is bored, take out the list that corresponds to the day and let them choose something to do together.

## Geocaching

If you and your family are the outdoorsy type, you might enjoy geocaching. Geocaches are small supplies that are hidden across the world, including here in Northern Ireland. Geocachers hide them, and then mark them websites or apps for others to find. Any device that can make use of GPS – including most smart phones – can be used to locate them.

When your intrepid little explorers find a cache, there will be a small logbook. They should write their names, the time and date when they found it in the book. They may also get a kick out of reading the rest of the book. Is this a cache that is well-known? Do they recognise any of the names? Are they the first to find this one? Some caches also include little containers that have toys or trinkets to take away with you. Make sure that you bring something to replace it – perhaps a pretty stone or seashell.

Geocaching sites are scattered across Northern Ireland –and you are unlikely to be too far away from one. Some of the more populated ones are Divis/Black Mountain, Castle Ward and Florence Court in Fermanagh.

## “What's on?”

Did you know that all 11 local councils in Northern Ireland put on events for families throughout the year? Many of these events are free and most don't even require you to buy a ticket. These events range from family fun days, free play performances, musical performances and much more.

To find these, simply search your local council area and “What's On”. Alternatively, click the links below:

[Belfast](#)

[Newry, Mourne & Down](#)

[Derry City and Strabane](#)

[Antrim and Newtownabbey](#)

[Causeway Coast & Glens](#)

[Mid and East Antrim](#)

[Ards and North Down](#)

[Fermanagh and Omagh](#)

[Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon](#)

[Mid Ulster](#)

[Lisburn and Castlereagh](#)

## Libraries and the “Big Summer Read”

In addition to events put on by the local council or community group, your local library is a great place to spend an otherwise dull day. A library visit can be an exciting and fulfilling experience for any child, speak to them about their interests and then help them find a book to read. The range and breadth of materials mean that even the most niche of interests can be catered for. Plus, the experience of signing up for a library card can be exciting for a child or family.

This summer, Libraries NI is also running the Big Summer Read. Any child under the age of 15 can call in, and get a reading chart and record card. At the end of summer, they will even receive a special recognition certificate. This programme is a superb way of ensuring that children learn even while off school and gives them a chance to explore the sort of literature they might not otherwise get a chance to at school.

## Conclusion

It is impossible to avoid being bored entirely – and some research even suggests that it would be a bad idea even if you could. Nonetheless, for the sake of serenity and to avoid stress, having a few ideas of how to combat boredom are always useful.

The key point is to help your child find their own way to beat boredom. While it can be tempting to go out of your way to provide a solution, forcing children to problem solve helps them to develop into better rounded, more creative adults. Communication as always helps – talk to your child and find out what they like to do. Having an understanding of what excites and interests them can help avoid the dreaded cry of “I’m *bored*”.