



Parenting Challenges:

I'm Bored!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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My daughter, her family and I were standing by the concession booths at the Medicine Hat Stampede when my seventeen year old grandson announced "I'm bored!" I just couldn't believe it!

We had gone through the pavilions, watched Clint Black and attended the Friday rodeo. Wrist bands for Saturday provided opportunity to ride in the midway all day. Our tummies were full and he was bored!

I asked "What would you like to do?" and the reply was "I don't know".

So often children and teens talk about being bored and I have been thinking about what they are really trying to say. Here is my translation: "I want you to come up with an idea and actions that will capture my attention and bring pleasure to this moment".

Now I'm not trying to be harsh but it seems as though the generation that we have blessed with technology that offers them instant gratification and few demands, has never learned how to come up with creative ways to entertain themselves and occupy their time.

Remember when you would go outside and bounce a ball against the side of the garage for hours? A couple of hand puppets and an old cardboard box could fill an afternoon with preparation for and staging imaginative theatre productions. A bag of marbles would allow a child to participate in tournaments that would last for the entire spring season. My sister and I loved to make mud pies in old coffee tins and then decorate the tops with tobacco from cigarette butts we found on the ground. We knew how to make fun!

So many things have changed for children in the past few years. When the suggestion is to go outside and play, the reply often heard is "Do I have to?"

I am sad to see children who don't know what to do if the power is off or the internet is down. Many of their friends are virtual and relationships largely consist of being able to enter abbreviated words into text messaging devices. And God help us if we ever try to limit computer time or take away an iPhone. You'd think we were cutting off the right arm!

The result of this lifestyle is that Michelle Obama had to come up with a move your body campaign to prevent and fight childhood obesity resulting from being sedentary. Many children and adolescents have lost their ability to entertain themselves and yes, we need to hear the words "I'm bored" being spoken right in the middle of one of the most interesting events of the year!

What's the solution? Perhaps it would involve not doing one thing but several:

1. Invest time in teaching the child about their options. Teach them the rules for playing marbles and board games. Encourage them to use their imaginations to create games with simple props. Talk about things that you loved to do as a child. Focus on simplicity - not technology.

1. When the child states "I'm bored" ask "What are the choices you have?" and put the responsibility back on them rather than trying to do all the entertaining. If they are always depending on you to be the social convener they will never be able to make good choices for themselves.

How many times do you, as an adult, feel bored. Probably not very many and the reason is because you have lots to do and look forward to free time when you can choose from a number of pleasurable activities.

Remember, as a parent, your job is to work yourself out of a job. The more skills and independence that you can foster in your child, the most successful you and they will be!