



Parent Pages

RESOURCES FOR CHRISTIAN PARENTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

UPON THIS ROCK: **Let Them Be Bored**

From the moment of infancy, we parents tend to think we need to see to it that our children are entertained for every waking moment of their day. We provide crib mobiles, video games and enrichment camps because we worry that a bored child indicates a neglectful parent. We mistakenly believe that free time is wasted unless children are learning or doing something.

But it is not the job of parents to entertain their children. It is the job of parents to raise their children in the faith, to provide shelter, food, clothing, medical care, education, guidance and love. Children do not *need* entertainment. What they need is engagement. Children are engaged when they are intently interested in an activity, and this puts them in a good position to learn something new. Engagement is not scheduled, introduced, encouraged or taught. Engagement happens when something starts out of an interest. It often starts with boredom.

When children are bored, they are forced to be self-reliant with their time. No one has scheduled an activity or provided an amusement. Bored children are able to find their own interests, and that is an important step toward creativity. Creativity starts with choosing a problem to solve or an interest to dig into. Creativity is not likely to happen unless there is some measure of boredom instead of busyness. Children who are over-scheduled and over-entertained are told what to do and what to like. Boredom makes children think on their own and plan their own time.

Because of parent work schedules, many children need accommodations for their summer hours. Resist the temptation to fill their days and evenings with passive entertainment and directed activities. How much time can you save for just sitting around with no plans? This should get easier as children get older, and it becomes even more important for healthy development.



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At the beginning of this summer, create an “I’m bored!” list. Brainstorm with your children possible activities and add them to the list. Encourage your children to interview you and other family members to get activities from your younger years to add to the list. Have your children sort the activities into categories, such as indoor, outdoor, quiet time, physical, with a friend, with a sibling, musical, building and so on. They might even want to rank the activities. When they play around with categories, they will think of even more options. Then just try to stop them from digging in!

As your children are creating this list, encourage them to think about service opportunities. Martin Luther emphasized service to others in his discussion of the 10 Commandments in the Small Catechism. In the meanings for the commandments, he not only explains what God *does not* want us to do, but he points us in the direction of what God *does* want us to do: honor our parents, protect, defend, serve others and so on. Remember to let your children think of the ideas for serving; this will start the process of creating motivation and interest. Soon, through the blessing of the Spirit, your children will be engaged and excited about the idea of living their faith while serving others.

Children who are used to being entertained might balk at being left bored. Constant busyness is a hard habit to

break. Some children may need to relearn how to play by being encouraged to find their own activity and to stick with it for a set amount of time. Try setting a timer and making the time spent on an activity a bit longer each time. You will know the experiment is a success the first time your child ignores the timer and keeps on building, reading or playing.

Another way to ease children into play self-reliance is to encourage them to make a plan for the next day. It is OK if they change the plan — that’s part of enjoying free time. But if they make a plan, they may worry less about how they will occupy their time.

“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” (Ps. 46:10).

Learning how to be still, how to think and how to be alone are important skills for living. In this verse, we are reminded that it is all too easy to let busyness, work and even entertainment come between us and God’s Word. Let your children be bored this summer. Help them learn to be still.

For Further Study

Here is a printable sign for a summer reminder:
pinterest.com/pin/61854194859385067/.

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