

Sometimes when I'm bored,
nothing feels fun.



I can't find anything to do.

Sometimes I just stare
out the window.



Sometimes when I'm bored,
everything bothers me.

I don't like any of my toys.
I've read all my books.



HELPING CHILDREN THROUGH BOREDOM

A Guide for Caring Adults

There are many ways to define or describe boredom: *dullness, tedium, idleness, the ho-hums, the blahs, doldrums, monotony*—and my favorite, the French word *ennui*. When it comes to boredom in children, I believe it's best defined as "a state of dissatisfaction that arises from an inability to find a more meaningful activity." Children who feel bored typically know, deep down, that there are many fun and interesting things to do. But when they are in the grip of boredom, they cannot seem to find how to seek out those activities or experiences. This is when the all-too-familiar complaint "I'm bored" is expressed, and children beg the adults in their lives to fix things so the boredom disappears.

Many young children are raised in home and school environments that revolve around structure. They may also spend downtime playing on computers, devices, and other digital platforms. Screen time and scheduled activities can help teach children the value of having routines and go-to playtime tools. However, when little ones are confronted with the timeless experience of just *being*, or just doing nothing, they can feel lost, frustrated, or uneasy. Screen time and overscheduling may appear to be boredom-busters, but, in truth, they are often diversions. And while these activities are meaningful, children also need time on their own to learn more about their own interests, creative urges, and self-care.

Sometimes When I'm Bored teaches children and adults to recognize the textures and effects of boredom. The book also shows readers that the discomfort of boredom can be an invitation to discover something meaningful about themselves—and about the world around them. Learning how to redirect feelings of boredom deepens problem-solving skills and builds the ability to shift negative thoughts to more positive ones.



WHY DOES BOREDOM HAPPEN?

When young children struggle with feeling bored, they are also typically struggling with managing time, developing control, and building skills. Addressing these areas will help them move from boredom to more meaningful experiences.

- **Time:** As many children have highly scheduled lives, when there are breaks to do other, unplanned things, little ones can feel uncertain about time management. This is why it's important for adults to provide free time and unstructured play for children. Doing so enables children to become comfortable with unstructured time and gives them the chance to start developing the skills needed to avoid intense boredom. Through this practice, children find the freedom to self-reflect, explore, create, and discover without predetermined rules or guidelines. Unstructured time has been shown to foster cognitive development, imagination, and creativity, as well as boost physical and social development in children.
- **Control:** One of the developmental goals of childhood is to cultivate control, also called agency: the ability to make choices, problem solve, and regulate feelings. Children who feel bored often don't recognize how to set their thoughts or ideas into motion, or how to consider and make choices. When children learn more about their own ability to think, feel, plan, and decide, they develop agency, which in turn helps them take steps to counteract boredom. Children not only feel more in control of their lives, but also gain a sense of belonging and self-confidence. Adults can also encourage autonomy in children to further foster agency. This means allowing children to choose what they want to learn and how they want to gain that knowledge. Another tip is to inspire a child to make *learning* the goal instead of *achievement*. In this way, little ones come to love the journey of learning any knowledge or skill—including combatting boredom.

