

Ep. #232: Boredom Isn't a Problem—It's a Gift



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host
Lisa Smith

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Welcome to Real World Peaceful Parenting, a podcast for parents that are tired of yelling, threatening, and punishing their kids. Join mom and master certified parent coach Lisa Smith as she gives you actionable step-by-step strategies that'll help you transform your household from chaos to cooperation.

Let's dive in.

Welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome to today's episode. I am so excited to be with you here today. Let me begin by painting a picture for you that might sound familiar. It's Saturday afternoon. You've just told your 10-year-old, it's time to get off their tablet immediately, and I mean, immediately you hear those two dreaded words.

I'm bored. And what happens next? Your brain goes into overdrive. You start mentally scanning, what can they do? Should I suggest art? Maybe we can bake cookies. Oh no, they look sad. Maybe just 30 more minutes on the tablet and before you know it, you've either become their personal entertainment director or you've caved and handed the device right back.

If this sounds like your house, you are not alone, and more importantly, you are not failing. In today's episode, we're gonna talk about one of the most freeing concepts in peaceful parenting. You ready? Boredom is not an emergency, and it's definitely not your problem to solve. Let me tell you about Sarah, a mom in our hive community.

Every time Sarah told her 8-year-old daughter, Emma, it was time to turn off the tv. Emma would immediately dissolve into tears, but I'm bored and there's nothing to do. Emma would cry and Sarah would feel this wave of panic, which you might recognize it when something like this, oh no, my kid is suffering.

I need to fix this right now. So Sarah would scramble. Well, you could play with your dolls. No, you could paint. No. Or maybe we could go to the park. When Emma rejected every suggestion, Sarah would think, well, maybe just one more show won't hurt. Right? Do you know this track in your brain? Well, here's what's happening.

Sarah had accidentally trained Emma's brain that I'm bored, was a magic phrase that either got mom to become the entertainment committee or give the screens

Ep. #232: Boredom Isn't a Problem—It's a Gift

back, but here's the plot twist. Emma wasn't actually bored. She was experiencing what I call transition dysregulation. That's a good one, right?

Transition dysregulation. Her brain was so used to the constant stimulation of screens that the moment, and I mean the moment it was removed, she felt uncomfortable and labeled that feeling as boredom. And Mom, Sarah. She was treating that discomfort like an emergency that needed an immediate rescue. Okay, your turn.

Let me ask you something. When your kid or kids say, I'm bored, what happens in your body? Do you feel anxious, guilty, responsible, like you need to spring into action. Okay. That feeling, that's your signal that you might be treating boredom like an emergency. Instead of what it actually is, a completely normal, healthy, even beneficial human experience.

Bear with me, I'm gonna get to that in a little bit. Beneficial human experience. But first, let's talk about the elephant in the room. 'cause it wouldn't be 2025 if we didn't address. Drum roll please.

Electronics. Because let's be honest, this is where most of today's quote, boredom emergencies happen. You see, our devices are designed by thousands of people in large corporations. They're designed to provide constant stimulation. Every swipe, every level, every notification gives our brains a little hit of dopamine at any age.

It's like emotional, fast food, quick, easy, and instantly satisfying. But when that stimulation is removed, our brains immediately feel understimulated. I mean, us parents experience this too. When we end a show or turn off our phones, our brains feel understimulated. And especially for our kids, that feeling gets labeled as boredom when it's really more like dopamine withdrawal.

Lemme tell you about Marcus, a dad. I was coaching his 12-year-old son Jake spent most afternoons gaming. When Marcus would call Time's Up, Jake would immediately start the boredom spiral. There's literally nothing to do. My life is so boring. All my friends get to play longer. I hate my life. You're a terrible parent.

Marcus felt terrible about this and he started thinking maybe I'm too strict. Maybe other parents are more relaxed. Maybe I should just let him play a little bit longer. But through our coaching, here's what we discovered. Jake genuinely did not know

Ep. #232: Boredom Isn't a Problem—It's a Gift

how to occupy himself without a screen, not because he wasn't creative or capable, but because his 12-year-old brain.

Had gotten so used to external stimulation, let alone electronic external stimulation with cool graphics and lights and rewards. Jake's 12-year-old brain had forgotten how to generate its own entertainment, and Dad Marcus was rescuing Jake from ever having to develop that skill. So we tried something different.

When Jake said, I'm bored, Marcus would respond with curiosity. Instead of panic or anger. Hmm. Sounds like your brain is looking for its next adventure. I can't wait to see what you come up with. And then, and this is the key part. Marcus would walk away the first few times. Lemme tell y'all Jake was not happy.

He tried all the standard things. Kids try everything. Bargaining, complaining. Even a few tears. I. But Marcus held the boundary with empathy. He would say, I hear you. Screens feel easier, and we're giving your brain a chance to flex its creative muscles right now. And you know what happened? After about a week, Jake started finding things to do.

He built an elaborate fort in the living room. He taught himself origami from a book. He even called his cousin just to chat. Jake's brain remembered how to be curious and creative when it wasn't being constantly fed stimulation. Here's another story, Lisa, a mom of three told me her 15-year-old daughter Maya had the same pattern.

Phone time would end and immediately, I'm so bored. There's literally nothing to do in this house would start. Lisa had been responding by suggesting activities. Which Maya would reject, or by extending phone time, just this once when Lisa stopped treating Maya's boredom as an emergency, something beautiful happened.

Maya started reading again. She reorganized her room. She even started cooking dinner with Lisa a few nights a week. But the most amazing part is that Maya told Lisa, thanks for not letting me stay on my phone all the time. I forgot how much I actually like doing other stuff. So good. Right? Now I wanna share something that's going to completely shift how you, yes, you think about your kids' boredom.

Because when we understand what's actually happening in those nothing to do moments, you'll never wanna rescue them again. So I wanna tell you about a few

Ep. #232: Boredom Isn't a Problem—It's a Gift

incredible gifts your kid or kids receive every time you let them work through boredom. Number one, their imagination comes alive. When kids don't have screens or adult planned activities, their minds start creating their own entertainment.

Suddenly couch cushions turn into castles, empty boxes become spaceships, and a pile of rocks turns into a whole civilization. This is their creative brain firing up in the most beautiful way, gift number two, they learned to take charge of their own happiness instead of waiting for someone else or something else to make their life interesting.

They start asking themselves, what do I feel like doing? This is how kids develop self-direction, one of the most important life skills they'll ever learn. Gift number three, their nervous system learns how to slow down. Today, our kids at any age live in such a fast-paced world. School activities, sports, constant stimulation.

Here's what happens. Boredom forces their brain to downshift into a calmer state. It's in this stillness that emotional regulation can develop. Gift number four, they discovered the magic of deep uninterrupted play. When kids have long stretches of unstructured time, they drop into what psychologists call flow state, those beautiful absorbed play sessions where they lose track of time completely.

This kind of play is incredibly nourishing for their developing minds. Gift number five, which might be one of my absolute favorites. They build their discomfort tolerance. Listen to this learning to sit with the feeling of, I don't know what to do without immediately panicking or melting down. That's building emotional resilience.

They're learning that uncomfortable feelings don't last forever and they can handle them. That's so good, right? Gift number six. Their problem solving muscles get stronger. I'm bored, is really their brain saying, I need to figure out my next move. And when we don't immediately solve that puzzle for them, they have to use their own creative thinking to work it out.

Next, they discover their authentic preferences instead of just consuming whatever entertainment is put in front of them. Bored, kids start exploring what they actually enjoy. Your kids might discover they love drawing or building or writing or

Ep. #232: Boredom Isn't a Problem—It's a Gift

cooking, or making up stories they never would've found if their time was always consumed by things put in front of them.

Another important gift that comes from boredom, they process their inner world. Those quiet unstimulated moments, that's when your kids' brains process emotions, work through experiences, and make sense of their day. It's like emotional digestion and it's really important for their mental health. And finally, and maybe the biggest gift is they develop true grit and persistence.

Getting through boredom without giving up teaches kids that they can handle challenging situations. It builds the kind of patience and perseverance that will serve them their entire lives. Remember Jake, the 12-year-old gamer I told you about. After just one week of his dad not rescuing him from boredom, Jake was experiencing all these gifts.

His creativity exploded. He built elaborate forts. His problem solving kicked in. He taught himself origami and his authentic interests emerged. He discovered that he really enjoyed chatting with his cousin, and they made it a daily practice. And Maya, the 15-year-old who is glued to her phone. When her mom stopped treating boredom like an emergency, Maya rediscovered reading, started cooking and even told her mom, she was grateful for the phone limits.

Now, these kids aren't any different from your kids. They're the same kids whose parents simply stop rescuing them from the discomfort of figuring out things for themselves. You like that? Me too. But you might be saying, so Fordham isn't an emergency, Lisa. What do we do when our kids come to us with those two little words?

I'm so glad you asked. First you check the connection tank. Sometimes I'm bored, actually means I need some time with you, mom or dad. I need some attention. Give them five minutes of full attention. No phone, no multitasking. Just connect. Often. That's all they need. If they're still bored after connection time, try these responses.

Hmm. Sounds like your brain is ready for its next adventure. I'm curious what you'll come up with, or boredom is your brain's way of saying, it's time to get creative. What an exciting opportunity, or, I trust you to figure out something that sounds fun to you. Notice what these responses have in common.

Ep. #232: Boredom Isn't a Problem—It's a Gift

They're curious, not panicked. They put the responsibility back on your kid or kids. And they frame boredom as normal, not tragic for the electronic situation specifically, you could say, I hear you screens feel easier. And maybe right now more fun. And this is your chance to discover what else you enjoy.

Or you could say your brain got used to constant entertainment. I so get that. It just needs time to remember how to entertain itself. Now here's what I want you not to do. Don't immediately start suggesting activities. Don't feel guilty about their discomfort. Don't negotiate about screen limits and please, I beg you, do not turn into the entertainment committee.

Lemme tell you about Rachel, whose 7-year-old would have epic meltdowns every single time iPad time ended. Rachel learned to say you are having big feelings about iPad time being over. I understand that. That's normal. Your body will calm down and then you can decide what to do next instead of trying to stop the feelings or fix the boredom.

Rachel just held space for both her and her daughter and the big emotions that were coming up. And you know what? The meltdowns got shorter and less intense because her daughter learned that having feelings about transitions was okay, but the boundary was not negotiable. So here's some age specific approaches you can take for kids.

Between the ages of five to eight, I want you to offer simple, open-ended materials, cardboard boxes, art, supplies, a ball, and step back. At this age, they might just need a tiny jumpstart before their imagination takes over. If your kids are in the range of nine to 13, I want you to resist the urge to suggest activities.

Ask instead like, Hey, what sounds interesting to your brain right now? Help them reconnect with their own curiosity. And if they say nothing or only the iPad or only another episode of X, just hold space and pause. And if your kid or kids are in the range of four to 18, trust them completely to figure it out.

Teens often use I'm board to process emotions or transitions. Just acknowledge. You could even say, sounds like you're in an in-between space right now. That's totally normal because here's what happens when you stop treating boredom like an emergency. When you the parent, stop treating it like an emergency, your kids become more creative at any age without constant external stimulation.

Ep. #232: Boredom Isn't a Problem—It's a Gift

Their brain start generating their own ideas. Suddenly cardboard boxes become spaceships and rainy afternoons become perfect for writing stories. They develop frustration tolerance. Learning to sit with the discomfort of nothing to do teaches them they can handle challenging emotions without falling apart.

They discover their authentic interests instead of just consuming what's put in front of them, they start exploring what genuinely sparks their curiosity. The screen battles decrease. When kids know that I'm bored, won't get them extra screen time, they stop using it as a negotiation tactic or trying to hold you hostage.

And here's my favorite outcome. Your relationship improves when you stop being responsible for their entertainment. You can go back to just being a parent. The pressure is off for both of you. Yeah. Before we wrap up, I wanna leave you with three powerful aha moments you'll take away from today's episode.

Aha moment number one. Boredom is not an emergency. It's not a you problem that needs immediate solving. It's not a them problem either. It's a normal human experience that can actually be beneficial for your child's development. Aha. Moment number two. If you feel pressure to solve your children's boredom, you might be contributing to the struggle, and I know that might be hard to hear.

Every time you rescue your kid or kids from their discomfort, you're accidentally teaching them that they can't handle the discomfort themselves and aha. Moment number three, creativity and resilience are waiting on the other side of boredom, but your child can only discover those gifts if you give them the space to move through the discomfort instead of around it.

So I wanna invite you to take a moment right now and think, how often do you rescue your kid from boredom? What would it feel like to trust them to figure it out instead and resign from being the entertainment consultant? So good right now if you're thinking, okay, Lisa, this makes so much sense, but I need help implementing this in my house.

I get it. I totally get it because I. Underneath all this is a boundaries issue, and many of us as parents struggle with learning and holding boundaries and holding them with empathy, learning to hold boundaries with empathy. Learning to resist the urge to rescue and trust your child's ability to work through discomfort.

Ep. #232: Boredom Isn't a Problem—It's a Gift

These are skills and they need to be learned and then practiced. In the hive, I can teach you how to create a home where your kids develop internal motivation and emotional resilience with personalized strategies created just for you. We practice the scripts, we work through the guilt, and we celebrate when your kids start discovering their own creativity.

Because here's the thing, when you stop being your child's entertainment director, you get to go back to being their biggest supporter. That's where real magic of connection happens. So if you're ready, and this speaks to you, and today's the day to join, I want you to go to the [hive coaching.com](https://hivecoaching.com) to join our community of parents who are raising resilient, creative, internally motivated kids.

Don't wait. Join us now. And in closing, I wanna remind you, your child's boredom is not your emergency. It's their opportunity and when you step back and trust them to figure it out, you're giving them one of the greatest gifts, possible confidence in their own ability to create joy and meaning in their lives.

I want that for you and I want that for your kids, and I want you to know it's possible. Okay? Until next time, I'm wishing you Peaceful Parenting. Thanks for listening to Real World Peaceful Parenting. If you want more info on how you can transform your parenting, visit the [peaceful parent.com](https://peacefulparent.com). See you soon.