

## Helping Kids Beat Cabin Fever

As the days get shorter and winter weather takes a turn for the worse, children spend more time indoors. Without fresh air and opportunities for vigorous outdoor play, kids can get that cooped-up, bored, restless feeling we call "cabin fever." Stuck indoors, too many children spend long hours watching television or playing video games, neither of which help them release excess energy or use their time creatively. Children with cabin fever may behave in unacceptable ways: whining, fighting with siblings, acting out to get attention or roughhousing to release tension. Here are some ideas for reducing cabin fever and curing the "I'm bored. There's nothing to do," blues.



1. Provide opportunities for vigorous physical activity. Bundle up children for cold weather and let them play outside for short periods of time. When that isn't possible, allow them to play actively indoors. Parents and children can dance or practice aerobics together. Parents may designate a space in the house where it is ok to wrestle and roughhouse. Furnish the space with old rugs and cushions and set limits on how rough kids can get. When you're changing the sheets on a bed (and you're in no particular rush), take a few minutes to play with your child. Wrap him up like a mummy or, with another adult, swing him in the blanket or sheet. Drape the sheets over furniture and pretend it is a cave to explore.
2. Drop everything when it snows. Unless it's bitterly cold outside, let kids play in the snow. They can build snowmen or snow forts, make snow angels, go sledding and throw snowballs (at safe targets only, please).
3. Ice-skating is a great winter sport, providing lots of challenge and vigorous exercise. Many rinks are open to the public. Bowling is a terrific indoor activity that offers friendly, fun-filled competition.
4. Put together a creative arts and crafts kit. Get a good-sized plastic storage box and fill it with some or all of the following items:

Crayons	Construction paper
Washable markers	Felt and fabric remnants
Pencils/pens	Ribbon/bric-a-brac
Scissors	Yarn or string
Hole punch	Beads and buttons
White glue/glue stick	Pipe cleaners
Tape	Plastic drinking straws

Glitter

Lunch bags

Tempera paints

Wiggle eyes

Paint brushes

Popsicle sticks

Bring the kit out when your child is looking for something to do or when you want to do something interesting with him.

5. Help children start a hobby. They may want to build model cars or rockets. They may want to start a card, comic book, coin or stamp collection. Or they may want to learn a skill, like playing the guitar or dancing. Hobbies can sustain children's interest in activities that foster learning, creativity and a sense of competence.

6. Winter is a good time to see those places you usually don't think about on warm, sunny days. Visit the library, local historical sites, a museum, art galleries, a university and other places of interest. Check out other community resources like indoor play/amusement centers, craft centers, indoor pools, school recreation programs and church activities.

7. Many children's libraries host a variety of craft, science, reading and play activities. Kids can often enroll in reading enrichment programs and receive stickers, prizes or certificates for reading a number of books.

8. Kids have a choice of many extracurricular activities like PAL or youth league athletics, after-school recreation, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and 4-H clubs. Let them join a team or club, but help them balance commitments to the team or club with schoolwork and free play.

9. Turn off the television and use the time for family games and activities. Play board games together or put together family photo albums. Share your family's history and your own childhood experiences with your children.

10. Let children participate in household tasks of their choice. Children who never seemed anxious to do household chores before may be willing to help out when they have nothing better to do. Cooking with kids is a great family activity. Teach kids how to bake and decorate a cake. Spend a chilly, rainy Saturday afternoon preparing meals together. You'll not only have fun doing something constructive, you'll find that the workweek is less hectic because of the meals you prepared in advance.

Your family doesn't have to be stricken with the winter doldrums. A little imagination and a lot of flexibility are all that's needed to pass the time until spring. By encouraging children to pursue creative alternatives to television and expecting a degree of indoor activity and messiness, parents can reduce their children's cabin fever.

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