

The Dangers of Boredom

For a few days I was speechless. Now I've found my voice.

We must care enough about our youth to do two things. Check back next week for my take on one of those. For today:

We must not be afraid of our children being bored and we must teach them to handle boredom well.

Boredom is a fact of life and our children and young people should know that. Do we model that or do they see us trying to escape quiet moments when we could be doing nothing? Do we look like we always have to fill every waking moment with something to do? Do we appear afraid of our thoughts? Of quiet? Are we?

Our fast-paced culture, more than ever before, creates an expectation in young people that is unrealistic. We're misleading kids by implying they should never be bored.

We entertain them endlessly with games on hand-held devices when they're toddlers and then complain when they play computer games forever when they're older. They can't handle being bored!

In some communities, we drive them to dancing, piano and gymnastic lessons and organize baseball and soccer teams (with all the uniforms and trophies of the big guys) so no one will be bored. In other communities, there's nothing for kids to do and nowhere for them to go. They're barely living as they wonder what to do next.

In school we move quickly from assignment to assignment and from test to test. There used to be a day when students could create their own learning opportunities. When there would be more for kids to look forward to.

Why do we wonder why some kids go from Coke to beer to liquor

to pot and to another kind of coke in rapid succession? And some go from flirting, to kissing, petting and intercourse even faster. They've learned no one should ever be bored.

Too many young people are dropping out of school and going into debt for new and grander "toys" and changing jobs and dates and mates all because they get bored or don't want to be.

But boredom is reality! Instead of implying children must never be bored, and knocking ourselves out to ensure they never are, we must tell them how boring much of life will be and give them many chances to learn how to handle boredom in a positive way.

We must encourage them to daydream during monotonous chores and create their own games, projects and entertainment while relying on their own brains to deal constructively with the inevitable frustrations of boredom. We can insist they come up with their own activities and make sure those activities are acceptable ones.

This Oklahoma killing probably wasn't the only recent killing or tragedy committed by young people who were trying to avoid boredom.

It can't be avoided. Boredom is a fact of life. Young people can learn to escape it appropriately. Will you help yours learn how? It may be a matter of life and death.

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