

Psychologists recommend children be bored in the summer

 qz.com/704723/to-be-more-self-reliant-children-need-boring-summer

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June 11, 2016

Do you entertain your kids with chess camp, art school, cooking classes, or tennis lessons during the unstructured summer months? Or perhaps all of them?

There are activities and summer camps galore to fill children's time and supply much needed childcare when kids are out of school. But psychologists and child development experts suggest that over-scheduling children during the summer is unnecessary and could ultimately keep kids from discovering what truly interests them.

"Your role as a parent is to prepare children to take their place in society. Being an adult means occupying yourself and filling up your leisure time in a way that will make you happy," says Lyn Fry, a child psychologist in London with a focus on education. "If parents spend all their time filling up their child's spare time, then the child's never going to learn to do this for themselves."

Fry is not the only one to point out the benefits of boredom. Dr. Teresa Belton, visiting fellow at the University of East Anglia with a focus on the connection between boredom and imagination, told the BBC that boredom is crucial for developing "internal stimulus," which then allows true creativity.

And though our capacity for boredom may well have diminished with all the attractions of the internet, experts have been discussing the importance of doing nothing for decades.

In 1993, psychoanalyst Adam Phillips wrote that the "capacity to be bored can be a developmental achievement for the child." Boredom is a chance to contemplate life, rather than rushing through it, he said in his book *"On Kissing, Tickling, and Being Bored: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Unexamined Life"*. "It is one of the most oppressive demands of adults that the child should be interested, rather than take time to find what interests him. Boredom is integral to the process of taking one's time," added Phillips.

Fry suggests that at the the start of the summer, parents sit down with their kids—at least those above the age of four—and collectively write down a list of everything their children might enjoy doing during their break. These can be basic activities, such as playing cards, reading a book, or going for a bicycle ride. They could also be more elaborate ideas such as cooking a fancy dinner, putting on a play, or practicing photography.

Then, if your child comes to you throughout the summer complaining of boredom, tell them to go and look at the list.

"It puts the onus on them to say, 'This is what I'd like to do'," says Fry.

While there's a good chance children might mope around for a while and *be* bored, it's important to realize that this isn't wasted time.

"There's no problem with being bored," says Fry. "It's not a sin, is it? I think children need to learn how to be bored in order to motivate themselves to get things done. Being bored is a way to make children self-reliant."

This same theory was put forward in 1930 by philosopher Bertrand Russell, who devoted a chapter of his book '*The Conquest of Happiness*' to the potential value of boredom. Imagination and capacity to cope with boredom must be learnt as a child, he wrote:

"A child develops best when, like a young plant, he is left undisturbed in the same soil. Too much travel, too much variety of impressions, are not good for the young, and cause them as they grow up to become incapable of enduring fruitful monotony."