Benefits of Boredom

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Is there an upside to boredom? Can a little frustration be a good thing? This podcast episode explains how, for young children, experiencing "healthy boredom" is an important part of their development since it can be a doorway to creativity and problem solving. These therapists surprised me by describing a feeling I remember having as a parent of young children -- the urge to over-entertain just to avoid whining. It can be so hard to dodge the constant stimulation that comes from "smart" devices, and to not feel pressure to constantly orchestrate our children's time.

We can aim to view boredom, not as something to solve, but as an opportunity for skill-building. There are simple strategies we can use to help children become more comfortable with discomfort. This short article describes ways to build children's ability to "tolerate the sense that nothing is happening." When my kids were little, I wish I had heard about creating a boredom budget. As described in the podcast, a boredom budget is the practice of intentionally allowing children to experience short bursts of boredom (maybe 5-10 minutes for young children) when you resist the urge to "fix it" and you let it play out. These therapists also suggest creating a "boredom menu" which is a no-frills, pre-made list of simple things kids can do to fill their time. In a moment when tension starts to build, a parent can hand the list to the child who can then pick something. Making a choice from a list can help a child practice task initiation and can give them a sense of agency -- another key ingredient for healthy development.