

Is Your Child Bored at School?

Complaints of boredom at school can signal larger issues, such as disengagement with learning or a consistent problem grasping a certain subject matter

JENNIFER L. NELSON

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Parents know that nothing is more important than their child's education, but for kids, a long day of multiplication tables or fraction drills may not always equal enthusiasm.

If your child has ever complained about being "bored" at school, experts agree it may simply be a kid's way of venting after a tough day. However, parents should still put on their detective hats to investigate the matter. Your 8-year-old may announce that math is "boring" for any number of reasons, and it probably has nothing to do with long division. "For kids, the word ['boring'] can have so many different meanings," explains Dr. Lucy Jo Palladino, a California-based clinical psychologist and author of *Dreamers, Discoverers & Dynamos: How to Help the Child Who Is Bright, Bored, and Having Problems in School*. "They could mean anything from 'It's too hard' to 'I don't like my teacher' to 'I felt



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embarrassed in front of my friends today.”

In many cases, boredom can translate into feelings of being over- or underwhelmed by the class curricula. “Sometimes, a child truly is feeling bored because the work is too easy or repetitive,” says Anne Rambo, associate professor of family therapy at Nova Southeastern University in Florida and author of *I Know My Child Can Do Better!* But the opposite may also be true. “Your child may find it easier to say he’s bored than admit he’s completely lost,” Rambo says.

Complaining of boredom may also be completely unrelated to a child’s studies. He may be feigning lack of interest to hide a larger issue, such as a problem with a teacher or fight with a peer. A child may blame his “boring” teacher for a poor grade on a science test, when in reality, it’s the result of a falling out with a lab partner.

According to Palladino, a child’s brain is wired to the “fight or flight” reflex that all humans share. While students can’t exactly flee school premises after an encounter with a bully or a less-than-stellar report card, they *can* mentally “check out” of their schoolwork. “This doesn’t necessarily mean your child has stopped enjoying school, or that he or she doesn’t love to learn,” says Jennifer Fox, educator and author of *Your Child’s Strengths*. But don’t write off or ignore the complaint, Fox says. It’s important to remember that a child can disengage from his education.

Taking Action

Sit your child down for a heart-to-heart to find out exactly what’s going on in school. Rambo suggests getting more involved in your child’s homework routine to determine if he is speeding through assignments and growing

annoyed by repetitive examples, or if he seems to consistently get stuck on a particular subject.

If this doesn’t help, try scheduling a parent-teacher conference to get a clearer idea of what’s going on in the classroom. Come prepared with ideas on ways to help your child engage in the subject material. “It’s up to teachers to individualize and personalize their lessons to make them relevant to kids,” Fox says. “But in order to do that, they have to know what their students’ strengths are and where their interests lie. That’s where parents come in.”

Work toward fixing the problem at home by applying outside-the-classroom passions to schoolwork. If your soccer star finds geometry boring, set up his own math corner with soccer-related puzzles, games, and activities. Encourage him to connect mathematical concepts to his favorite sport. If your

second-grader balks at the thought of opening a book “for fun,” channel her interest in animals into a lifelong love for reading with a subscription to *Zoobooks* or animal-themed books on tape. Kids should be able to associate what they’re learning in school with their personal lives.

The Tech Effect

Kids today are accustomed to processing a constant stream of information from smartphones, video games, computers, and other media. This can generate a sense of under-stimulation in a traditional classroom setting. So, if studying passages from an English textbook doesn’t generate quite as much excitement as playing word games on Mom’s iPad, your child isn’t totally to blame. “In the digital age, kids are conditioned to higher levels of stimulation, so parents need to set limits on technology,” Palladino says. If your fourth-grader relies on a [reading app](#) to

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learn vocabulary words, her English skills may improve, but she may suddenly find phonics workbooks "boring."

Engage the entire family in at-home learning opportunities, such as renting movies, visiting museums, and checking out library books related to classroom curricula. "Play school" and let your child be the teacher; this can encourage him to inform the rest of your family about what he is studying. Finally, set an example by talking to your child about what you learn each day. Let him see you reading and discovering new things, Rambo says.

Technology can certainly further kids' learning and improve skill sets, but to see success in school, it must be combined with personal attention, support, and encouragement.

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