



Joan E. LeFebvre
Family Living Agent

Parenting

the

Preschooler

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/pp/>

Beating the Winter Blahs

Cabin fever is the common type of “blaahs” that all of us feel from time to time. Mid-winter blahs are normal when winter loses its popularity—the car won’t start, the fuel bills soar, when it has been -20° F. for the past few days, and the children have become bored with all the toys and games they have.

Indicators of Cabin Fever

Being less active. Many people lower their pace of daily activity following the holiday season and find themselves bored with their limited range of mid-winter activities.

Changes in sleep patterns. Cabin fever can affect sleep patterns either by “sleeping the winter away” or, on the other hand, suffering from insomnia.

Irritability. A person with cabin fever can be a real bear, responding to others with anger and hostility.

Withdrawal. Much of the isolation of winter is self-imposed. Many people retreat to their homes and reduce their social outlets.

People with cabin fever may have a closed-in feeling, restlessness, frequent temper flare ups and disagreements, boredom, feel a need to spend money, search for activities, and have an unexplained sense of frustration. As a parent, your cabin fever can affect the quality of

interaction you have with your children. And, children can also be affected with cabin fever blahs.

Strategies of Coping with Cabin Fever

Develop a mental attitude that winter is to be enjoyed, not endured. Most people live in the snow belt by choice. Change your attitude to your environment — “active wintering” can be a lifestyle. You’ll be teaching your preschooler to enjoy one of the longer seasons in the Northwoods.

Don’t hibernate. Cold weather should not be used as an excuse for self-imposed inactivity. There are really very few days that you cannot venture out into the cold winter weather. Just be sure you and your preschooler are dressed for the weather. Take a snow shoe walk in the woods, go ice fishing, get your sleds or tubes out for sliding, make snow angels, build a snow fort, play fox and hen in the snowy yard.

Enjoy the wildlife. Feed the birds. Get a book that has pictures of birds and see how many you and your preschooler can identify. While you take a walk outside, look for animal tracks with your child. See how many different tracks you see each time. Or, pick a set of tracks and follow them. Talk about what the animal was doing; where it ate, what other animals it visited, where it returned home.

Strategies for Coping with the Indoor Confinement

Risk reaching out. People need people. Join a play group or storybook hour in your community to give you and your child a chance to connect with others. Nothing thaws a winter chill better than the warmth of good companionship.

Talk. Turn off the TV and talk to your preschooler. Some options are:

- Create a “who’s who” board with your preschooler. Post pictures of relatives, friends, day care providers, and other important people in your child’s life. Talk with your child about all the people who care about him/her.
- Partner with your child to write a book about your child. (This is a project that may take several days.) Explain that you will write the words and that your child can draw the pictures. When it’s time to write, you might say, “Let’s write about...a funny thing you did today...a pretend game you like to play...what you did at Grandma’s birthday...your favorite toy...a pet in your family.” Be sure you capture, word for word, your child’s way of talking. Date each time you write in the book. You’ll end up with a treasured keepsake and have fun doing it.
- Bedtime is ideal time for you to share some quiet time with your child. Do “tuck-in talks.” Explain that your preschooler has to be in bed, with pajamas on and teeth brushed before the tuck-in talk starts. Spend at least five minutes listening to your child’s answer to questions like these: What is the best (funniest, naughtiest, scariest, etc.) thing that happened today? What is something you hope to do tomorrow? What do you think it is like to be a big person? Make up your own

questions, and be ready to answer a few questions from your child. End with a kiss and hug.

Get out of your normal routine. Do something different. Children love a special day that takes you out of your normal activities. Use one of these themes or create your own as a cure for cabin fever:

- Sundae. Get all the fixings for sundaes and let everyone put on their own toppings.
- Pretend day at the beach. Put on swim suits. Set up a giant beach umbrella and spread out colorful beach towels. Provide a beach ball, sand pails and shovels, empty suntan oil bottles, beach hats and sunglasses.
- Exercise. Take out music that prompts you to move around. Have everyone take turns leading an exercise.
- Gardening. Plant seeds or bulbs. Bring out garden catalogs to dream about spring.
- Hammering away day. Get colorful tacks, blocks of wood, and lightweight hammers. Let the kids pound away.
- Luau. Put flowers in your hair. Cut up a fresh pineapple. Play Hawaiian music. Say, “Aloha,” all day for hello and good-bye.

Help your child start a hobby. The majority of us have developed our lifelong leisure interests and hobbies by age 21. Winter can be a time to help your child gain life-long interests in art, reading, handicrafts, or some other hobby. Your local library is a great place to discover hobbies and learn more about them.

Sources:

Dave Bast. Preventing Cabin Fever. UW-Extension. 1981.

Trisha Day, Steve Small, Ellen Fitzsimmons. Family Times. 1987.

Kidcare@extension.umn.edu. 2002.

Author: Joan E. LeFebvre, Professor, Department of Family Development, University of Wisconsin-Extension
Reviewer: Dave Riley, Extension Specialist, Child Development and Early Education, UW-Madison
Layout: Penny Otte, Program Assistant I, Family Living Area Office, Vilas County

For more information on Parenting and Child Development, contact: Joan E. LeFebvre, Area Family Living Agent, University of Wisconsin, Extension, 330 Court Street, Courthouse, Eagle River WI 54521-8362, 715-479-3653, FAX 715-479-3605, E-Mail joan.lefebvre@ces.uwex.edu February, 2003