

HELPING YOUR CHILD FIND THEIR NATURAL HIGH CONVERSATION STARTERS



What is a Natural High?

A natural high comes from any activity that makes you feel good—but doesn't involve drugs. Doing things you enjoy, like riding your skateboard or dabbling in photography, releases natural feel-good chemicals in your brain like dopamine, which regulates movement, emotion, motivation, and pleasure.

THE 'LET'S FIND YOUR NATURAL HIGH' CONVERSATION

In the top five most annoying things kids say to their parents has to be this: "I'm bored." When I was a kid, if I happened to utter this in front of my grandma, she would snap back: "Only boring, uninteresting people get bored. Get over it and find something to do." Although her approach lacked a little tact, she had a point. Kids today have more entertainment options than ever before (a fact every dad on a road trip likes to bring up at least once a day.) It's also the sign of healthy self-awareness, self-management, and emotional regulation to be able to entertain yourself. Boredom, however, is a problem – especially during social distancing and virtual schooling. Kids who are engaged, connected, involved, and busy have less opportunities to engage in risky behaviors. In our temporary reality, we think it's important to take a look at how boredom is impacting our kids.

In 2016, researchers in Australia sought to understand how boredom affects teen substance use. In a longitudinal study with thousands of teens, they proved that teenagers who experience more boredom also turn to substance use more readily. South Africa suffers from widespread adolescent substance use. Teens in their country have limited opportunities for recreational activities plus a high degree of leisure time. Sound familiar?

The opposite of boredom isn't entertainment, it's engagement. Engagement is dynamic, interesting, and makes time fly. Engagement happens when we're curious and when we experience some cognitive dissonance. Think of an engaging lecture you've listened to or an engaging conversation. You definitely know the opposite – you know the meeting that seems to last forever, or the presentation that makes you angry for how irrelevant it is.

That's why this is so important for parents and educators to understand. We can't assume that business as usual will work during this time – or ever, really. We need to learn how to engage kids by challenging them, provoking their curiosity, and giving them the space to explore what bugs them.

So how do you help a kid who's bored?

That's the million-dollar question. We know that helping kids find an activity that lights them up can change the trajectory of their lives. We think this is as important of a time as we've ever faced as a country to be intentional about helping kids reflect on their natural highs. To help them chase their own curiosity, provide opportunities for them to learn what they want to learn, to build or fix things with their hands, to try new activities, or to cultivate an interest in the arts or an outdoor activity.

So the next time you notice your kid acting or feeling bored, jump in the car and ask them where they want to go and what they want to do.

HERE'S A SIMPLE EXERCISE YOU CAN LEAD YOUR KIDS THROUGH A FEW TIMES OVER THE YEARS.

Start a conversation with these questions.

- What can you imagine doing with your life if everything goes really well?
- What can you imagine your life being like?
- What can you imagine happening to your life if you happen to choose to use substances?
- What would you miss out on or lose?
- What will happen to your friends if they choose to use substances?
- What will you need to decide to do or not do to be on a good path?

As you know, the perception your kids have about life and themselves change as they grow and evolve.

This isn't a one-time conversation - it's a discussion to have continuously throughout the years. Helping them to imagine their future will help them make clearer and wiser choices in the present.

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Natural High Examples

The list is really endless. Here are a few ways to get your kids involved in something that will spark their Natural High!

- Sports
- Art
- Books
- Nature
- Exercise
- Cooking
- Join a club or youth group
- Volunteer
- and the lists goes on and on.



Help them join a sports team.



Find art classes they can attend a few times a week



Get them out in the fresh outdoors, hiking or biking can be a great source of natural high and exercise.

For more information about Natural High and video content to watch as a family go to www.naturalhigh.org

