

Positive Parenting  
August 2011  
Marilyn Sharpe

## VALUES AND SKILLS: LESSONS IN THREE BAGS

“I’m bored!” We’ve all heard this plaintive wail or whiny declaration. There are two parent traps we often fall into while responding to this pronouncement:

1. “How can you be bored? You have a room full of toys. You should be grateful, not bored.”
2. “Well, you could always ...”, followed by a list of endeavors that the child normally enjoys, with perhaps a “clean up your room” thrown in for good measure.

The first parental response often elicits, “But there is nothing new / fun / exciting. What I really want is a ...” fill in the blank with the newest electronic device or expensive toy. In my experience, the second suggestion falls on deaf, or at least resistant ears and is sure to be met with a negative “but that’s boring” or “I don’t feel like it” or “that’s too babyish.”

A resourceful, creative, faithful mother of two has come up with a third ... successful ... response. “Let’s get three bags for each of you. Fill one with TRASH: you know, the toys that are broken or missing important pieces or parts. One is for DONATIONS: these are the toys in good shape, with lots of play value for another child, who is younger or has different interests than you do right now. One is your RAINY DAY BAG: in here go toys that you still like, that fit your interests and skills, but which haven’t been played with much lately.”

Remember, boredom is simply a signal that your child is done with one thing and hasn’t yet decided what to do next. De-cluttering helps identify possible toys to play with and lessens distractions.

On the day your child requests a new toy, invite your child to look through the Rainy Day Bag. See if there is something in the bag your child would take out and use.

When your child gets a new toy, have the child select an existing toy to donate. It’s a wonderful way to keep acquisitiveness and accumulation under control.

What values are you teaching? Gratitude. Generosity. Caring. Awareness of the needs of others. A service ethic. Mindfulness and intentionality. And you are helping to push back against excessive consumption that overwhelms children.

Simultaneously, you are teaching the skills of bringing order to their environment, keeping the sheer volume of “stuff” in their lives manageable, and helping them discern what is trash, what they can share with others, and what to put away for right now.

It’s never too late for adults to learn the same lessons!

## FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Have adults try it first. Tackle a clothes closet, the garage, kitchen cupboards, bookshelves or any of the other places you accumulate things. Fill your three bags. When you are done, show your work to your children, describing what you did, why you did it, and what you'll do with your donations.
2. As a family, visit two or three donation sites for their toys - Salvation Army, Goodwill, ARC, or an inner-city pastor, who helps distribute the toys year around to children in need. Have a volunteer or employee tell you the story of what happens to the donations they receive. Then, decide where you will donate.
3. Say a prayer over the toys, asking God to bless the children who will receive them, thanking God that you have gifts to share with others.
4. Pray a prayer of gratitude for the toys and possessions that are remaining, the things your child has chosen to keep.
5. On a rainy (or blizzard-y or boring) day, get out the rainy day bag. Enjoy revisiting the old toys, now fresh and new, with restored play value.