

5 Easy Ways to Beat the Winter Blues

Beth Wegerbauer

1. Open a Doll Spa or Car Wash

When it's dreary outside, fill the tub with warm water, cover the bathroom floor with towels and let your kids bathe their dolls and all their tiny clothes. Use a mild shampoo, or buy a box of a gentle baby clothes detergent, and set up a drying rack with clothespins.

Have on hand a few "beauty" products for after the bath: combs, hair ribbons, powder, maybe even a few preemie or size 1 diapers. A car wash for miniature cars can be just as fun, especially if you have a handheld shower nozzle. Afterward, organize the sparkling fleet for a car show!

2. Start a Book Club for Kids

A kids' book club can provide relief from winter boredom in two ways. First, it offers a fun weekly (or monthly) get-together, and second, it is a great incentive to read stories that jump-start the imagination.

Partner with a friend or neighbor, then send out invitations that include the title of the first book (ask your librarian for a recommendation) and a weekly or monthly time to meet. A bookmark, with extra spaces where the book titles will go, makes the perfect invitation. Before the club meeting, all the kids read the same book (or specified chapters), then come together for snacks and discussion. To get things started, the host child might want to write up a list of five discussion questions (What was your favorite part? Who was the best character and why?). Or, if the readers are little, you can read aloud while they listen or draw along to the story. You might consider choosing a theme for the books—maybe all winter stories, or all summery stories, or books from everyone's favorite series of the moment.

3. Set Up House

If you've got magazines and catalogs hanging around, let your kids fill an afternoon or weekend with this fun project. For each child, draw a simple house shape on a poster-size piece of paper, then set out magazines/catalogs, scissors, glue sticks, paper, and markers and let the decorating begin. Each person can custom design her or his own house--filling it with everything from furniture to teapots to fishbowls. Encourage kids to add fantasy touches: What would make houses more fun? To make their creations more durable, you can help attach the "permanent" fixtures (couches, tables) to the house by covering them with clear Con-Tact paper. Objects that might need to be moved around can be covered front and back with Con-Tact paper and cut out (double-sided tape on the back will help them stick in place). Still have materials left? Make a whole town!

4. Dress Up a Candleholder

This easy craft offers an hour's worth of activity and a winter's worth of light and warmth. To make a decorative votive candleholder, your child can cut or tear pieces of colored tissue paper, then glue them to a glass jar or candleholder to make the design he likes (a brush makes applying the white glue easier). Overlapping the different colors creates a stained-glass effect. After the design dries, put a votive candle in each holder and light it for a warm and cheery dinner hour.

5. Busy Town, USA

Let your kids set up a miniature town with tons of toys: wooden blocks, tiny plastic people and animals, miniature cars, the train set, Legos. Each child picks characters and arranges the homes and businesses of her or his imagination. Let them make miniature signs for the town where each family member's name is used---Mom's Diner, Taylor's Tailor, Fido's Pet Shop.

Beth Wegerbauer is Co-Owner of Building Blocks and the mom of four kids who love to stay busy!