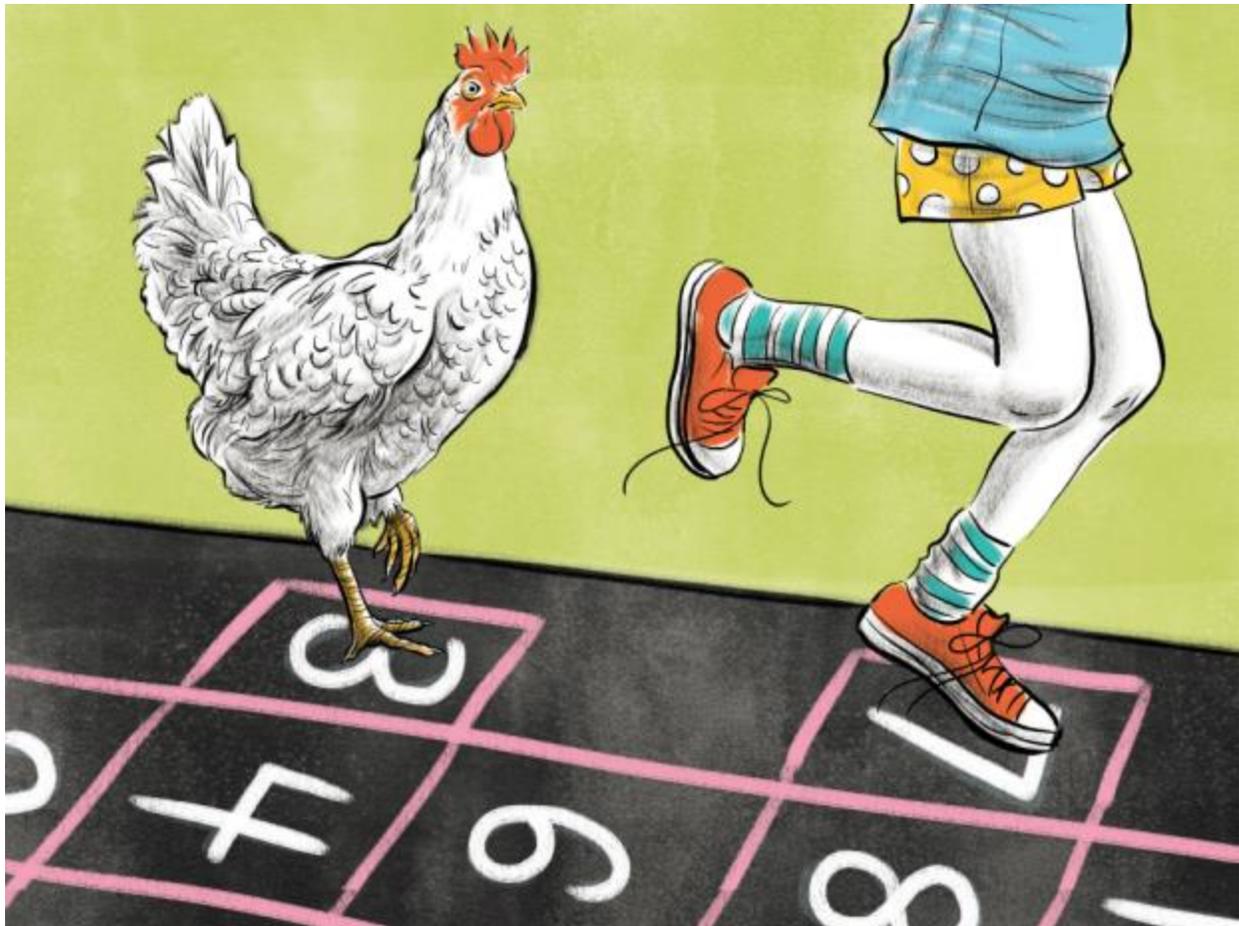


‘Mom, I’m bored!’ Here are 15 ways to keep the kids occupied this summer without breaking the bank

MELISSA LEONG | July 19, 2016 5:08 PM ET

[More from Melissa Leong](#) | [@lisleong](#)



To keep her six children occupied during summer staycations, Julie Cole created a backyard fun zone, complete with a spring-free trampoline, a toy roller coaster, a pool and chickens.

"When you create a kid-friendly backyard, you hear less of 'I'm bored' and you save yourself a whole lot of money on expensive day trips," says Cole, co-founding vice-president of Mabel's Labels. "If we

go to Canada's Wonderland, tickets are about \$40 to \$50 each. Throw in some refreshments and that turns into a \$500 day for a family like ours."

With the kids out of school for the summer, keeping them entertained can get expensive. And it's already a challenge to cool summer spending, what with vacations, socializing and outdoor activities calling.

Cole rents chickens for the summer, treating the kids to feathered company and egg collecting. She also keeps a "cheery box of fun" outside filled with low-cost items such as sidewalk chalk, water balloons, bubble wands and soap.

Fowl aside, here are 15 more ways to keep the kids busy without breaking the bank:

Anticipation, as research has shown, creates happiness. So **post a calendar** where the kids can see upcoming plans and events. "The week before summer began, we always made a list of what we wanted to do, it was our summer bucket list," says Hollie Pollard, who blogs at CommonCentsMom.com.

Now before you go to any event or outing or attraction, **Google the name of the venue and look for any discounts**. "(Groupon has) great local offers, everything from visits to farms, to trampoline parks, to indoor playground deals," says Emma Kelly, co-founder of Bargainmoose.ca. "If you've never shopped with Groupon before, you can get \$10 off \$25, which can really help."

Help the kids develop their entrepreneurial spirit. Warren Buffet started his first business when he was six. (He bought a six-pack of soda for 25 cents and then sold each one for a nickel, for a tidy five cent profit.) For your family lemonade stand, don't forget to explain to the kids that their earnings need to cover the initial investment of lemons, sweetener and supplies. And talk to them about how they want to use the money, whether it be saving for a bike or donating to a local charity.

"We made sure we had chances to give back in the summer as well," Pollard says. Her family would clean up the park or help a neighbour in the garden or bake and deliver cookies.

Take advantage of free stuff. It could be story time at the library, crafts at your community centre, movies in the park or local festivals. Don't forget to pack your own water and snacks - festival food, though delicious, can get pricey.

Get the ball rolling. The summer-long Kids Bowl Free program allows registered kids to play two free games every day. Check out KidsBowlFree.com to find an alley in your area.

Cultivate a little gardener. This may sound like you're tricking your kids into doing yard work, but engage your kids in the activity - get them their own mini tools, have them paint crafts or gnomes for the garden and involve them in choosing herbs and vegetables to plant. You'll also be reaping the future rewards of fresh food and lower grocery bills.

Keep an adventure pack in the car with towels, bathing suits, fishing nets, garden shears, etc. so you'll **be ready for spontaneous free fun** at a splash pad, lake or field of wildflowers. Consider also stowing a small cooler for drinks and a stash of granola bars, fruit, etc.

Similar to Cole's outdoor box of fun, **create a "rainy day treasure chest"** for inside the home. "Basically, you fill the special chest with exciting items which you can then crack open when they're bored," Kelly says. She suggests things such as finger paints, Play-Doh and craft supplies.

Search online for craft ideas or DIY games or science experiments. Make a backyard obstacle course with pool noodles. Build a fort out of rolled up newspaper. Use painter's tape to create roads on the carpet for toy cars. "One of the most popular ideas lately (on bargainmoose.ca) was these ice-cube sailboats made from items most moms would have around the house anyway – drinking straws, construction paper and ice cubes," Kelly says. Just be wary of any ideas that require buying too many supplies you can't envision at least one other use for.

If you're looking to get away, **camping is one of the cheapest vacations you can enjoy.** You just need to pay for gas, gear, groceries and camping fees (in Ontario parks for example, fees can range from about \$17 to \$51 per night, depending on the facilities and services).



Taking a train can be a cheaper alternative to flying when exploring your home country, especially when Via Rail is offering a summer special for families: kids aged two to 11 travel for \$15, Kelly says. The journey is a kind of entertainment in itself, but if boredom sets in your indoor "treasure chest" offers a perfect slate of low key activities to keep kids occupied.

Summer camps can add up to hundreds and even thousands of dollars. To save, **consider a do-it-yourself camp.** Get together with a few other families and have each family host a day of activities in their yard. Design an experience at home with a schedule of activities and/or a theme.

Big box stores often offer free or low-cost activities. Some hardware stores will run workshops teaching kids to build things such as bookends and planters: Lowe's, for example, has a workshop to teach kids how to make a toy police car. Meanwhile, Michael's offers 30-minute workshops for children three and older for \$2 and \$15 painting classes for teens. If you're looking for the added

benefit of included food, President's Choice runs cooking classes at its stores (\$9 for tots between two and five, \$20 for older kids). Just don't get carried away shopping while the kids are having fun.

Keep an adventure pack in the car with towels, bathing suits, fishing nets, garden shears, etc. so you'll be ready for spontaneous free fun at a splash pad, lake or field of wildflowers

Lounge at a hotel pool. If you're at the hotel for, say, a manicure, the family might be able to use the hotel amenities for free, says Sandra Hanna, co-founder of SmartCookies.com. "See if a local hotel offers an affordable day pass," she adds. "Call your local tourism bureau even though you're not a tourist; they offer incentives for locals too."

Watch Saturday morning cartoons (and other films). You can screen family-friendly movies at Cineplex at 11 a.m. on Saturdays for \$2.99 while supporting charity, as proceeds go to Free The Children.

Financial Post