

5.13 Allow Yourself To Be Bored

Occasional boredom is healthy, not something we need to fix.

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When we catch ourselves feeling bored, it's easy to conclude that we are doing something wrong and immediately alter our behavior. We may decide that we should work more, get some exercise, or put together a grocery list. Alternatively, we may feel a powerful urge to scroll through social media or slump in front of the TV. Another way to look at boredom, however, is that it may be an indication that we are not fully present. If we refrain from attempting to fix our boredom and instead observe it, we can learn the lessons it has to teach us.

Pauses like this can bring us into dialogue with a deeper layer of truth where we can witness our unexamined habits (see Tool 5.12). This tool starts by investigating our boredom and discovering what's possible when we allow it.

When boredom hits, we may turn to our old habits to distract ourselves, even before we've had a chance to consciously choose what we're doing. By getting in touch with our boredom, we can uncover the root causes of our dissatisfaction and defeat the temptation to indulge in habits that don't serve us.

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- Allows us to peek at the knowledge that lies hidden beneath boredom.
- More control over choices and behaviors.
- Awareness can bring a sense of pleasure that doesn't depend on external stimuli.

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- Sitting quietly with boredom instead of masking it may feel increasingly unpleasant.
- Ingrained habits may maintain a powerful draw, making it very tempting to succumb to them instead of exploring the emotions they mask.

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When you catch yourself doing something automatically or engaging in a habit that you're not sure serves you, this might be a sign you are bored. Try to resist the temptation to be active with no purpose and lean into your present experience.

Pausing for a moment and becoming aware of your boredom invites you to explore the present moment. How is your body? Are you well rested? Aside from boredom, what other emotions are present? What do you need right now, other than a momentary distraction?

Sometimes, this type of inquiry will bring valuable insights into your life, habits, and choices. These insights may allow you to identify patterns, break unconscious habits, and create actionable changes. Over time, these subtle shifts may build into significantly different choices.

To take this tool further, spend a little time making an inventory of your negative habits, such as

emotional eating or reflexively scrolling through your phone. Most of us scan social media, check our email, or shop online more often than we really need to. These activities give us a quick dopamine hit but don't satisfy our deeper needs.

Once you understand your go-to solutions to boredom, you can investigate these habits. Do you really need to pick up your phone, or would you rather do something else—perhaps nothing at all?

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1. <https://time.com/5480002/benefits-of-boredom/>.
 2. <https://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4217586/>.
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