

Eva Mendes has spoken about her plans for her daughters, Esmeralda, 7, and Amada, 6, during the school holidays, with the actress revealing that she is “bringing boredom back”.

Mendes, 48, told *Byrdie*: “I really feel like when we’re bored – not stimulated by a phone, or an iPad, or computer or television – that’s when ideas come in.”

After spending a few months in London, where long-time partner Ryan Gosling was filming, the *Hitch* star said she hoped to alter the level of activity now that the family were at home.

“When we were in London, we went from musical to musical taking advantage of being back in the theatre,” she said. “We went to all kinds of museums, we went to Windsor Castle – I had a tonne of field trips planned for them, which we did. And now I feel like it’s time to bring boredom back, especially for the kids, but for myself as well.”

While the idea of giving up the “square au pair” aka TVs or iPads to occupy children during the hot summer months can seem daunting to frazzled parents, Mendes could be on to something.

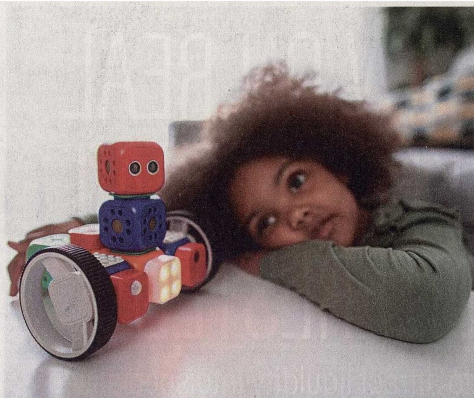
Sofia Stigka, a child psychologist from Thrive Wellbeing Centre by Dr Sarah Rasmi in Dubai, said: “Boredom is the base of creative thinking, the condition that will trigger a child’s natural curiosity to discover the world around them and that will help them channel their unlimited imagination and need for movement and activity.”

“It also helps them develop valuable executive functioning skills, such as problem-solving skills, decision making, prioritisation and flexibility. This free-of-structure play promotes self-regulation and fosters confidence, self-reliance and independence. While being bored, objects obtain new characteristics and innovative purposes, giving kids the opportunity to exercise their pretend play skills.”

Mother-of-three Eleanor McAlister, a primary school teacher from Ireland, has experienced the benefits of a “summer of boredom” for her three children, aged 6, 8 and 10.

For her family, this involved opening the back door and letting her kids create their own fun in the garden – with as little adult intervention as possible. “As a teacher, I’m very aware of how children learn through play,” McAlister said.

“Having that freedom to play without rules is so valuable for building resilience, for learning to deal with conflict resolution and for building confidence. I resist the urge to be prescriptive and just leave my kids to it and let them experiment and make up their own fun. I’ve seen my kids become incredibly creative in making up their own games,



Some parents want youngsters to connect with nature instead of electronics during the holidays Unsplash / Robo Wunderkind

HOW ‘BORED GAMES’ CAN HELP MAKE PARENTING FEEL LIKE CHILD’S PLAY

► Psychologists and teachers back plans for a screen-free school break as Hollywood actress Eva Mendes encourages daughters to unplug, writes **Aoife Stuart-Madge**



with their own rules and they have begun to recognise the value of having rules, without me laying down the law.

“They have learnt to settle fights and squabbles between them, and their sense of independence and confidence has vastly improved.”

As well as stimulating children mentally, physical play can improve physical well-being too. “Practical play promotes body and hand-eye co-ordination, development of fine motor skills and sensory regulation,” said Stigka, who advocates going back to basics. “The environment creates and offers different opportunities for play. Three-year-olds, for example, have all they need at the beach – sand, rocks, seashells, water and, of course, their hands.”

Conversely, overexposure to

electronic devices deprives youths of what Stigka calls “the cornerstones of a social skills set: meaningful social interactions and communication”.

“Set-up electronic entertainment limits a child’s motivation to use their own mind to come up with creative game ideas, as they rely on the



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SOFIA STIGKA
Child psychologist

electronic games’ instructions, unable to deviate from it and thinking only within the confines of the software,” she said. “Consequently, social circles and creativity are among the affected areas from electronic games, limiting a child’s capacity to make their own fun.”

For mother-of-two Chloe Billing, from the UK, embracing free play during the Covid-19 pandemic led to the launch of family business Me-shirt Kits, personalised T-shirt painting kits for youngsters.

“We started our business during lockdown when I was homeschooling with a new baby in tow and I wanted to focus on my then 5-year-old’s mental health through the pandemic,” she said.

“I didn’t feel it would be beneficial for any of us if she watched TV all day long and I



wanted her to get something from her time with me and to have fond memories of lockdown that extended beyond finding new things to stare at on the TV.

“We talked about what she’d like to do that would make things more interesting in the limited world we had been put in. We settled on an art project a day, which inspired her to

Eva Mendes, who has two daughters with Ryan Gosling, is going back to basics this summer AFP

learn about artists and techniques and experiment with fabric painting, which led her to come up with the idea of our personalised T-shirt painting kits, and we started selling them to friends. Now, we are selling online and she’s been able to sell to real customers and supply kits and party bags to friends too.”

Stigka said: “Children need time to themselves, to daydream, to listen to their thoughts, to observe their environment and to respond to the stimuli that the world around them has to offer.

“Downtime with no exposure to electronic devices gives children the opportunity to discover their personal interests, to experience the world with a critical eye and to end up with creative ideas.”