Cabin Fever

Trapped inside the house with your children, give these “cabin fever” tips a try.

**Table Magic:** Throw an old blanket or bedspread over card table or kitchen table and create an instant cave, fort, playhouse, or hideout.

**No-Ant Picnic:** Pack sack lunches and go on a “hike” through the house looking for a good spot to picnic. When you find it, roll out an old blanket, eat and share favorite stories and songs.

**Dance-a-Thon:** Too much energy? Put on some fun music and dance! Take turns playing disc-jockey and spinning your favorite tunes.

**Star Attraction:** Have at least one favorite movie video that’s just for viewing on “special” occasions (like when a tired parent needs a break).

**Neat? NOT!** Let go of having a neat house. Designate an area for playing and don’t even think of picking up until the end of the day. Make it a goal to have a fun, enjoyable day with your children.

**Dress Up Race:** Give each child a bag of old clothes. Set the timer for 60 seconds and turn off the lights. Children can race to put on everything in their bags before the timer rings. Since they can’t see what they are putting on, the results can be pretty hilarious!

**Self Portrait:** Place butcher paper or newspaper on the floor and trace the outlines of your children with a marker. Then each child can cut, paint or color his or her own life-size portrait.

**Cool Dough:** Play dough is easy to make at home and only takes a few ingredients: 2 cups flour, 1 cup salt, 2 cups boiling water, 4 tsp cream of tartar or alum, 2 T cooking oil, and food coloring. Mix all ingredients in a bowl. Knead until smooth. Knead in food coloring. Store in an airtight container.
In The Car

Here are some tips to help you keep your “cool” on the road.

**Plan Ahead**

**Set Rules:** For example, keep seatbelts fastened at all times; keep hand, feet, and objects to yourself. Don’t start the car unless the rules are being followed.

**Take a Pack:** Have children pack a backpack (or bag) with things to keep them occupied and comfortable (books, tapes, games, snacks, etc.).

**Use Rewards:** Establish a reward for good behavior; for example, stopping at the video store and renting a movie.

**In the Car**

**Navigator Role:** Children like to feel useful and can be put in charge of reading road signs, watching for the right exit, or picking the next gas station. On a long trip, let your child mark the route on a map with the highlighter as you travel.

**Counting Games:** Count billboards on each side of the road, out-of-state or weird license plates; number of cows or horses (if traveling in the country).

**Take Turns:** Give each child a turn in deciding which tape to play or radio station to tune in. This can cut down on complaints such as “he always gets to choose the music”.

**Fighting:** Ignore fighting and compliment them when they are behaving well.

**Set Consequences:** Let children know what the consequences are for misbehavior; for example, losing the privilege of stopping at the library or renting a video. Remember, consequences work only when you consistently follow through.

**When All Else Fails...**

**Stop the Car:** Find a safe place to pull off the road. Take some deep breaths and say: “I don’t want to drive when you are… (fighting, arguing, etc.). If we can’t solve the problem, I’m going to turn around and drive home.” When everyone is calm, take a few minutes to try to negotiate a solution. If nothing works, drive home.
It’s Not Fair!

Is your child’s whining driving you to distraction? Here are some tips that will help turn whiners into communicators.

**Whine Facts:** Whining is a natural consequence of children having less control over their lives than they would like. Knowing this may help you feel more empathy for your child and make whining a little easier to tolerate.

**Whine Prevention:** Head off whining by checking in with your child: “Are you hungry? Would you like a snack?” This way you’re coaching your child on how to identify needs so she can ask for help instead of whining. Another prevention tool is to let your child know what to expect: “When we go shopping today, I will not buy you a toy.”

**Whine Decoding:** Learn when a whine means “I’ve reached my limit” versus “I’m trying to manipulate you.” Manipulation is natural, too, and you don’t have to give into it.

**Riding the Whine:** You’ve decided it’s manipulation and not a legitimate need or request. Here are two ways to ride out the whine:

  - **Coach:** Communicate a more effective way to get your attention: “I don’t want to listen when you talk that way. I’ll be happy to talk with you when you stop whining.”

  - **Limit:** Set a limit on the number of questions you’re willing to answer. When you’ve met the limit, close the conversation. This only works if you stop talking!

**Let ’Em Whine:** It’s only natural for your children to want things and get upset when they don’t get them. Consistent, fair parenting is guaranteed to make you unpopular at times. So relax and know that you’re just doing your job.
On Time

Here are some tips to help your child manage routines and time.

**Plan Ahead**

**Daily Routines:** Help your child set daily routines for morning, after school, and bedtime. A checklist is helpful for your child to remember what to do.

**Prepare Ahead:** Make morning less hectic by preparing the night before. Make lunches, lay out school clothes, pack backpacks.

**Buy a Clock:** Get an alarm clock for your child to encourage responsibility for getting up in the morning.

**During the Day**

**Cut Corners:** If your child has a regular routine but is running late, help him/her cut corners or shorten parts of the routine. For example, he/she can make his/her bed when he/she gets home from school.

**Transition Time:** Let your child know that you will be leaving and what he/she needs to do to get ready; for example, “We will be leaving in 10 minutes. You need to have your lunch packed and your rain boots on.”

**Praise:** Give compliments when your child is on time; express appreciation.

**Allow More Time:** One child may need more time that the others to get ready. Getting up 10 minutes before the other children may make the difference in being ready on time.

**Rhythms and Rituals:** Set up a special bedtime ritual with your child. Such as reading a book or talking about the day. Older children may want time to read to themselves before turning out the light.

**If All Else Fails...**

**Off Limits:** If you can’t tear your child away from the TV, games, or books in the morning, make those activities off limits before school.

**Cut Back:** If your family is always rushing or late, consider cutting back on the number of activities you commit to.
Mealtime

“Cool” tips for turning mealtime into a pleasant experience.

Make mealtime a family time...

Habit Forming: Make your goal to share 3 to 5 meals a week as a family. It doesn’t have to be dinner – any meal works!

Everybody Helps: It may seem easier and faster to do it yourself, but the time you invest in teaching your children to pitch in will be worth every minute. Let your children handle all the safe parts of cooking a meal, serving it, and cleaning up.

Manners 101: Start early! Think how pleasant mealtime will be when your children learn to wash their hands, come to the table when called, ask to be excused, say “thank you” and “please” and clear their place when finished – MOST of the time (nobody’s perfect).

Soul Food: Enjoyable conversation is to the soul what food is to the body. Try these conversation starters or think up some of your own:

- “What was the best thing that happened today?”
- “How’s your school project going?”

“YUCK!”: If your children refuse to eat a meal, they won’t starve before the next one. Make the goal of mealtime to have a pleasant family ritual: “It’s OK not to eat, but we expect you to join us at the table.” (P.S. The key is to stick to the next regular meal schedule – don’t make them another meal an hour later.)

“I’m Not Hungry!”: This often translates into “I’m having too good a time to stop what I’m doing”. Try giving transition time: “We’ll be eating in 10 minutes. I’ll call you when it’s time to wash your hands.”

“OOPS!”: Expect accidents. Focus on what needs to be done: “Jill, you’ll need a sponge to wipe up the juice.” Keep paper towels and sponges where children can reach them. With younger children, you may need to do the cleaning up.
On The Phone

Here are some tips to help your child learn to respect phone time.

**Plan Ahead**

**Call Back Later:** Avoid making calls at times when your child is likely to need your attention (for example, before or after school, at meals, or bed time). Tell callers: “I’ll have to call you back later.”

**Keep Calls Short:** Save longer calls for when your child is sleeping, at school, or when another adult is around to help out.

**Things to Try**

**Find an Activity:** Take the time to get your child involved in an activity before you use the phone. You may want to keep a few toys or some paper and crayons near the phone. Children sometimes just want to be nearby and this can keep them occupied while you are on the phone.

**State Expectations Clearly:** “I’m going to make a call now. Please play quietly until I’m finished.”

**Use a Timer:** When you set the timer, explain that you will be available to talk when the timer rings. You can even have the child set the timer – that way he can keep checking back with the timer instead of interrupting you.

**Interruptions:** When your child interrupts, say calmly, “I’m talking on the phone now. I’ll talk with you when I’m finished.” Then follow through on your promise.

**Praise:** Remember to praise your child for following the rules, “I really appreciated how you played quietly while I was on the phone.”

**If All Else Fails...**

**Consequences:** If your child continues to interrupt or is behaving inappropriately, end the conversation and deal with your child’s behavior. Use a consequence for misbehavior that fits the situation; for example, playing too roughly – spend quiet time in room; fighting over the TV – turn TV off, etc.
Do I Have To?!

Children _learn_ how to be responsible.

**Chores Are Important:** Teaching children how to do work around the house may seem like a chore in itself. However, the rewards are great: you get the help and your child learns to take pleasure and pride in being a competent, contributing member of the family. Or, at least that’s the goal!

**Habit Forming:** Having one or more daily chores helps children develop a lifetime habit of caring for themselves and others. It’s also easier to remember chores when they’re part of a daily routine.

**A Family Affair:** Doing chores as a family can be fun. Pick a weekend morning, put it on the calendar, and see how much can be accomplished when everyone pitches in. Treating the crew to pizza for lunch is a great reward and incentive.

**Today’s Helper:** Being mom’s or dad’s special helper for a task works well to teach children a chore they’re not yet able to do on their own. Your child learns from watching you and by helping with the easier parts.

**Effort Counts:** When you look at your child’s work, you may be tempted to offer corrections. Be gentle. Always start by praising your child’s effort and the parts that were done well. Then it’s okay to say: “Next time I’d like you to…”

**Hands Off:** Although it may be difficult, resist the impulse to go back and “fix” your child’s work. Nothing is more certain to discourage your child from learning and improving than your “helpfulness”.

**Nag Not:** Nags and threats seldom inspire cooperation. Keep chore reminders brief: “Make your bed”, “Feed your dog.” If the reminder fails, use Grandma’s Rule: “When you (feed the dog), then you can (watch TV).”
At The Store

Here are some tips to make shopping a positive experience.

**Plan Ahead**

**Be Realistic:** Is your child too tired or hungry to shop? Are you? If yes, postpone your trip.

**Review the Rules:** Before entering the store, state your expectations; for example, “Stay with me”, “Look with your eyes”, “Walk in the store.”

**Take a List:** Let your child know what’s on the list and how much you have to spend. This helps with understanding the realities of family budgeting.

**At the Store**

**Let the Child Help:** “Do you remember where the beans are?” “Help me find the chicken soup.” They can also help with reading the list: “What do we still have to get?”

**Read Labels:** Teach your child to read labels. “We need spaghetti sauce. Can you choose one that doesn’t have sugar listed in the first 5 ingredients?”

**Give responsibility:** Let your child push the cart, add up prices on a calculator, cross things off the list, etc.

**Praise:** Show appreciation. “Shopping is a lot more fun when you’re along to help out.”

**Negotiate:** If your child is starting to get tired or bored, address those feelings. “You’re tired and we’re not finished yet. We still have bread, apples, and jam to get. What would you like to do?” Then be ready to negotiate.

**Add Fun:** Stop at the library, museum, or local park for a fun break during shopping.

**If All Else Fails...**

**Respect Limits:** If misbehavior persists, it may help to shorten shopping trips and to go when your child isn’t with you. Trade babysitting with friends when you need to shop by yourself.
The Cool Kid

Help your children learn positive ways to keep their cool.

“Cool Down” Coach: Learning to read the early warning signs is half the battle. Coach your child to recognize his or her own physical and emotional anger signals. “Wow! You look like you’re feeling really mad to me. Maybe you need to go out to the backyard and kick the soccer ball around.” “Boy! You’re looking really frustrated. Maybe you need to take a brake and do something else for a while.”

Anger Tamers: Help your child find acceptable outlets for venting anger and frustration.

Things to try:

- running laps around the yard
- scribbling an angry picture
- pounding play dough
- singing a mad song
- counting to 20 breathing deeply

Word Power: Help your child express feelings with words: “After you have cooled off, talk with Michael and tell him what he did that made you so mad.”

Negotiation: Older children can learn to develop their ability to negotiate and compromise: “If you feel the limit I’ve set is unfair, what is a better solution?”

Set Limits: While felling angry is OK, some behaviors are never acceptable. Having rules about those behaviors can help children stay within the limits you set: “No matter how angry you feel, it is never OK to hurt someone else.”
The Cool Parent

When you feel yourself losing your “cool” with your children, try some of these ideas.

Stress Meter: Keep an eye on your stress level and when it starts to go up, take action! Taking care of yourself isn’t selfish – it’s smart.

STOP: Take a moment to get your emotions under control. You can’t parent the way you want to when you’re out of control. You can go back to parenting when you’ve calmed down.

“Cool Down” Coach: Find an understanding friend or family member who can listen and help you get yourself under control.

Anger Busters: Leave the room, take a walk, talk with a friend, clean the house, garden, listen to music – the goal is to find an activity that helps you release anger and frustration. Angry feelings can generate a lot of adrenaline that needs to be released before you try to parent.

The “NO” Zone: As soon as you say “no” to your child, the battle is on. Avoid giving an instant answer if what you really need is time to consider the request. Try: “It sounds like you really want to _____ (example: spend the night at Sally’s). I’ll have to think about it and let you know.” If the answer is “no”, then say so up front.

“I Hate You!”: It’s normal for children to say things they don’t mean when they’re angry. Although you may feel hurt, don’t respond in anger. Acknowledge their feelings: “You must be really angry with me right now.” Later, coach your child: “Instead of saying you hate me, you can say you’re really angry with me.”

“Not Again!”: Always getting angry about the same stuff? Maybe it’s time to set some new limits, rules, or expectations: “Dirty clothes belong in the clothes basket. From now on, your clothes will only get washed if you put them in the basket.” Feel like a meanie? Not at all! You’re helping your child realize the consequences of not cooperating, and giving him/her the choice to cooperate.
You Can’t Make Me!

Backtalk is a natural part of growing up – another way of testing limits.

**Try to find humor in the situation:** If you can keep your sense of humor, backtalk will be just one more of those annoying things kids do, and not the end of the world.

**Who Me?:** Does your child sound like anyone you know? Without meaning to, we can be our child’s best teacher in the art of disrespectful communication. Practice giving what you want to get.

**Battle Weary?:** If so, maybe you need to pick your battles more carefully. When confronted with backtalk, ask yourself: “Am I willing to go to the wall on this one?” If not, save your thunder for something really important.

**Not Another “NO!”:** It’s tempting to use “No!” as an all purpose parenting tool. “No, you can’t watch that.” “No, I won’t take you.” “No, you can’t have that.” Unfortunately, the indiscriminate use of “No!” tends to encourage backtalk. One parent put it this way: “You’ll be raising this child for 18 years. Don’t spend all your “nos” in one place.” Choose wisely.

**Room to Negotiate:** Instead of an immediate “No”, buy time to have a discussion. “I need time to think it over. Why don’t you come back in half an hour with all the reasons you think I should say “yes” and we’ll talk about it then.” Follow through with your promise and give your child your undivided attention. You may end up saying “no” anyway, though if your child feels heard and respected, the “no” will be easier to take.

**Timing Is Everything:** Learn to recognize when you’re not able to negotiate or even listen to your child. Be honest: “We’ll have better luck with this after dinner. I can’t give you my best right now.”

**Exit Stage Right:** Remember, backtalk loves an audience. You don’t have to be one. You can leave during the first act. And, don’t stick around for the encore.
I’m Not Sleepy!

A bedtime battle is the last thing you need after a long day. Be kind to yourself and your kids by making bedtime something to look forward to.

The Possible Dream: Establishing a bedtime routine may feel like the ultimate challenge, though the time and energy you invest will be worth it! Your child will be happier and you’ll get that much needed time to yourself at the end of the day.

Wind Down: As bedtime approaches, encourage quiet activities such as reading, homework, or working on a project to ease the transition. Save food with a stimulating effect such as colas, sweets, and chocolate for earlier in the day.

Time For Bed!: Nobody likes to stop in the middle of something, so it’s a good idea to prepare your child by saying: “Bedtime will be in 15 minutes.” Give some thought to when you want your child in bed so you can avoid hassles, like picking a time in the middle of your child’s favorite TV show.

Snooze Attitude: Make bedtime nice for your child. Even 15 minutes to read stories, talk about the events of the day, sing songs, rub your child’s back, etc. will do wonders to help your child develop a super “snooze attitude”.

Missing ZZZ’s: You’ve done the deluxe bedtime routine and your child is wide awake and wants to stay up. Breathe deeply and explain that, while you understand he/she may not feel sleepy, bedtime means he/she has to stay in his/her bed. Quiet play or reading is okay. As long as your child is in his/her room and in his/her bed, the rest (pun intended) is up to him/her.

Off Duty: You’ve finally got them in bed! Hurray! This is your time to yourself, to do what you want to do. Resist the temptation to start in on your “to-do” list and take care of yourself instead. Sweet dreams will be yours!