Bored with doing the same routine day after day [1]

Dear Alice,

How could one live life doing the same things every day for the rest of their being? Just repeating the same tasks over and over again and again. Seeing the same things day after day. Nothing new. Nothing exciting or enjoyable. I'm so incredibly bored that it is driving me insane. I could go get a job, but I've done that already. And if I do, then it will be going to work day after day. There are a lot of things that I could be doing, but I've done them all already. Is this normal? I'm only eighteen. What should I do?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Boredom can certainly be frustrating and leave you feeling a bit unmotivated, unhappy, or defeated, making it difficult to look for a more exciting option. While everyone experiences boredom at some point in their life, the causes may be slightly different. For instance, boredom may result from not being able to pay attention to what you’re doing because of the level of stimulation, or it could be because the activity in which you’re engaging isn’t consistent with your goals. Based on the cause of your boredom, there are some strategies you can try to overcome it. If trying to address your boredom in different ways doesn’t seem to be helping, it may be a good idea to talk with a mental health professional to determine if there’s an underlying concern.

While you describe yourself as feeling bored, what this might be hiding is a desire within you to try some new activities. It’s possible that some of what you’ve tried doesn’t provide enough stimulation to keep your attention piqued. If this is the case, maybe you can think creatively about how to increase the level of difficulty so it provides you with a more exciting challenge. Maybe you jog along the same path every day. It's familiar and you know the change in elevation and scenery very well. What about investigating some trails around where you live that have different changes in elevation and new-to-you scenery? On the flip side, it could be that the activities you’re trying are too taxing, which causes you to lose interest. A potential solution could be to break the task down into smaller chunks to make it easier. Writing a research paper can be a pretty daunting item on your to-do list. Breaking down the sub-tasks required to complete a research paper and allocatting enough time (and probably more than you think you need) to complete each sub-task may make it feel more achievable. Perhaps these ways of keeping
yourself occupied aren’t helping you achieve the goals you have for yourself. All of these are potential causes for your boredom. To get started, though, taking some time to reflect on what’s causing your boredom and how the activities you’ve engaged in align with your goals and values could help you be on your way to a more fulfilled life. What are excited about? What in your life do you wish you had more or less of? What would you like to achieve? In what ways do you use or could you use your time and energy to address those goals?

The upper-teen years often presents a crossroads in life for many people. Finishing high school and having to make decisions about the future may lead some to feel stuck, a bit scared, and maybe even a little down when considering the choices ahead. Have you thought about what you want your future to look like? What sort of picture do you have in your mind about what the next few years might bring? Many people struggle to figure out what kind of career is right for them, and how to get there. Perhaps contacting your school’s career office, guidance counselor, or advisor to learn more about different careers that offer more dynamic work environments will bring to light other potential areas of work.

What about a change of scenery? If your current location has limited opportunities, you might also consider moving somewhere else with more variety of activities that you find interesting. If you’re a student, your school may offer a number of resources to help you find creative and low-cost ways of exploring different locales and venues for learning. If you currently have a job, you may consider asking if your company has branches in other areas or if they’d be able to send you on assignments away from home. There are also organizations such as the Peace Corps and Teach for America that are always looking for potential participants with relevant skills.

Aside from jobs and school, folks who are starting out on their own may feel that they have a lot more responsibilities to manage and as though life is going to be less fun as a result. At some point, the people and daily activities that used to be new and exciting can start to feel less special and more like obligations. As with all the other ebbs and flows of life, there can be times along the way that are more interesting than others. It might help to think through how a given activity puts you closer to your goals as a way to reignite your motivation and interest. Another way to frame boredom is that it’s an opportunity to get your creating juices going, either through daydreaming or letting your mind wander about what you do find interesting. These thoughts may open your mind to other ways for you to feel engaged.

If you’re still feeling bored after trying these different strategies, you may consider processing these feelings with a mental health professional. They may help you find the roots of your boredom, develop ways to cope with the lackluster times of life, identify or clarify your goals, and find some enthusiasm for the choices ahead of you.

The world is your oyster; you may just have to spend a little time to find your pearl!

Alice!
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