

Ennui explained: How *Inside Out 2*'s new emotion affects kids

Anxiety, envy, nostalgia, embarrassment and...ennui?

Four of the new emotions in the upcoming Disney/Pixar movie [Inside Out 2](#) – the latest peek inside the mind of now-teenage girl Riley – are sure to ring a bell.

But what's ennui?

A quick Google search will tell you it's just another word for boredom. But there's more to it than that, says [Kyle Boerke, PsyD](#), a clinical child psychologist and the director of behavioral health outpatient services for OSF HealthCare. And you can also count Dr. Boerke as a fan of the *Inside Out* franchise. He says the first movie and the [trailer for the second](#) get a lot right when it comes to kids' emotions and how parents can help.

Ennui demystified

Dr. Boerke says ennui (pronounced awn-WEE) describes an angst or listlessness-type boredom that develops in the pre-teenage or teenage years. It can show itself in adulthood, too, but the younger years are the prime time.

"As we learn to regulate our emotions better, you're going to see less of that emotion overtly," Dr. Boerke says. "It will still be there, but we're learning to express it better."

Children experiencing ennui may mope around the house or not be interested in things they used to, like playing with Legos.

How parents can help

Should we learn about emotions from Hollywood? Common sense says to take everything on our screens with a grain of salt and to talk to a health care provider for trusted advice. But Dr. Boerke says parents can use the *Inside Out* movies to teach kids about healthy behaviors.

"The biggest thing we can do with children from a young age is understanding and naming emotions," Dr. Boerke says. "If I can get a two, three or four-year-old naming emotions, I have succeeded. And the first *Inside Out* movie did a fantastic job with that."

Some things to consider when chatting before, during or after these movies:

- There are no "bad" emotions, Dr. Boerke says.

"If something sad happens, it's okay to be sad. If something frustrating happens, it's okay to feel anger," he says.

"While there are no bad emotions, I can express an emotion in a bad way," he adds. "I can express happiness in a bad way by overindulging in something. Or sometimes happiness comes out as anger. I'm so excited and happy that I go and tackle my friend to the ground."

- Dr. Boerke says ennui, like other emotions, has a good middle ground. Children shouldn't be overstimulated or completely bored. But somewhere in the middle lies a silver lining: a spark of creativity. A child may, out of boredom, go outside and kick a soccer ball around, sparking curiosity in a new hobby. Or they may call a classmate, leading to a new friendship. Dr. Boerke says sometimes it takes a mental health professional to light the spark.

"Often, I don't even say things that are different than what parents say. But I'm not mom or dad. I'm not the caregiver," Dr. Boerke remarks. "It's what we call behavioral activation. Let's come up with things to do to help you become less bored."

- Don't bottle up emotions. The *Inside Out 2* trailer even addresses this in a tongue-in-cheek way, showing Riley's emotions from the first movie – joy, sadness, anger, fear and disgust – in a literal bottle.

"If they do it as well as I think they will, this will be a great conversation starter," Dr. Boerke says.

"An emotion, if left to its own devices, is going to come up. You're going to express it, hopefully appropriately. And it's going to go back down again," he adds. "However, if we bottle that emotion up, it's going to fester and rise until it can't be controlled. Then it comes out in an inappropriate way."

For example, a child may continually bottle up frustration over being asked to clean their room until they trash the room. Long term, behaviors like this can impact a litany of things: the child's mental health, physical health, performance in school and relationship with peers. Plus, it strains the rest of the family.

Learn more

Read more about mental health resources on the [OSF HealthCare website](#).