

Family  
Valleyscene

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Alan Lehman/Daily

Matthew Furnee, 2, picks artificial apples out of a crate on a recent visit to the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum in Winchester. He was with his mother, Renae Furnee, of Charles Town, W.Va.

# Cabin fever



Children play together while their mothers supervise at the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum in Winchester.

Try these tips to help keep young children occupied in winter

By Stacey Rice  
Daily Staff Writer

The house seems to be shrinking in size, the sun seems to set not long after it rises and the children can't wait for summer. They're getting in fights with their siblings, no toy is good enough and they're often downright crabby.

While some parts of the country are buried under several feet of snow, the Northern Shenandoah Valley has enjoyed a very mild winter. But, while, at times, it has seemed more like May than January, there are still days when the wind blows and the temperature falls. When everyone is cooped up inside on those days, it's easy for cabin fever to sink in.

According to Webster's New World College Dictionary, the definition of cabin fever is: "A condition of increased anxiety, tension, boredom, etc. caused by living for some time in a confined space or an isolated area, especially in winter."

The phrase is said to have originated in 1800s western America, when homesteaders were forced to stay inside their cabins for extended periods during the long winters, according to the American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms.

"[Cabin fever is] a layman's term for how people feel in the winter," says Dr. Tinea Savage-Otey, a board-certified pediatrician with Shenandoah Pediatrics in Strasburg. And, she adds, while some of the symptoms of cabin fever, such as irritability and depression, are similar to those of Seasonal Affective Disorder, "it's not necessarily a medical diagnosis."

The mood alteration is not limited to adults. Children have a lot of energy, and being stuck inside can have a negative impact.

"Kids can have depression and mood disorders. Children can be affected, which we're seeing a lot," says Dr. Savage-Otey. "If they have less of an interest in their usual activities, if they're not eating well, not sleeping well, if they're having more behavior problems, acting out or being more aggressive, take them to their pediatrician to make sure it's not something else and they're not just bored."

One way to help avoid cabin fever with children, Dr. Savage-Otey suggests, is to have a daily routine and stick to it, especially with children who are not of school-age. Give children something to look forward to, such as story time each day, movie night once a week or family game night.

She also suggests using the downtime as a learning opportunity, especially with young ones who are nearing kindergarten.

"Teach them the things they need to start school. Teach them their numbers, letters, colors," she says. "But my biggest suggestion is to find ways to unify the family and spend quality time with your kids. Focus on things you can do together as a family to strengthen your communication and bond as well as things that will enrich and educate your child."

One educational opportunity is tucked into a storefront on the Loudoun Street Mall in Winchester. The Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum offers children an interactive, hands-on learning environment, says Niki Wilson, director of marketing and development for the museum.

"Children can come and expend some energy, learn, be creative and use their imagination," she says.

Youngsters can learn how simple machines work while working in the apple packing shed, play doctor-

**'Bust the Winter Blues' Children's Party**

- When: Saturday
- Where: Shenandoah County Library in Edinburg.
- Time: 1 to 2 p.m.
- Sponsored by Teen Council
- Call 984-8200 for more information.

— Source: Shenandoah County Library

**Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum**

- Location: 54 S. Loudoun St. in Winchester, on the Loudoun Street Mall.
- Hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 1 to 5 p.m. on Sunday.
- Admission: \$5, but children under 2 are admitted free.
- Call 722-2020 or visit the Web at [www.discoverymuseum.net](http://www.discoverymuseum.net) for more information.

— Source: the museum

patient in the hospital emergency room and ambulance, and test their agility on the climbing wall. Families can learn how to work together to build a playhouse in the building station, and let their imaginations run wild in the art room. And, the museum sponsors a visiting artist series on the second weekend of the month from September through June in which various artists demonstrate their crafts.

In the ranger station, pull-out drawers offer loads of scientific fun, while costumes allow children to become their favorite animal. And, there's even a live King Snake. An on-staff paleontologist allows children to watch him work on fossils brought back from Montana each summer.

The average stay at the museum is two to four hours, and admission is good for the entire day. The museum is even open on snow days when schools are closed.

"[The children] are learning as they play. They're only limited by

their imagination," Wilson says.

Dr. Savage-Otey also suggests having arts-and-crafts time. Find an inexpensive table that can take a beating and place it in a corner of the family room or kitchen. If the flooring is carpet, consider putting plastic garbage bags under the table so spills are easily cleaned up.

Web sites designed with families in mind offer a wealth of ideas, from creating dinosaur dioramas and hand-puppet families to paper snowflakes and jewelry beads made from bread dough. For hundreds of mom-tested ideas, visit [kaboos.com](http://kaboos.com), [enchant-edlearning.com](http://enchant-edlearning.com) or [kinderart.com](http://kinderart.com).

On [crayola.com](http://crayola.com), young artists can print out coloring pages, choose craft projects or create cards for every occasion. With Digi-Color, an online coloring tool, children can let their creativity run wild with various mediums like markers and crayons and then print their creations.

FEVER, D2

**"BUT MY BIGGEST SUGGESTION IS TO FIND WAYS TO UNIFY THE FAMILY AND SPEND QUALITY TIME WITH YOUR KIDS. FOCUS ON THINGS YOU CAN DO TOGETHER AS A FAMILY TO STRENGTHEN YOUR COMMUNICATION AND BOND AS WELL AS THINGS THAT WILL ENRICH AND EDUCATE YOUR CHILD."**

DR. TINEA SAVAGE-OTEY, A BOARD-CERTIFIED PEDIATRICIAN WITH SHENANDOAH PEDIATRICS IN STRASBURG

## Fever

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There's even a section where children can learn all about their favorite colors.

Local libraries also are a good resource for activities for children. The Handley Regional Library System, Shenandoah County Library System and Samuels Public Library all offer story time programs for young children and teens, and occasionally sponsor special events. This weekend, families can head to the Shenandoah County Library in Edinburg for its "Bust the Winter Blues" Children's Party on Saturday.

Teen Council, a group of high school students from southern Shenandoah County, sponsors the event, which had a successful debut last year drawing more than 40 parents and children. The library will transform into a craft fair during the free party from 1 to 2 p.m.

"There will be five or six craft stations, and the children can rotate through and make a craft at each station at their own pace," says Jewel Painter, children's specialist at the library.

While the party is geared toward elementary and middle-school pupils, children of all ages are welcome, says Painter.

"It's something the family can do together. It's open to the whole family, and it's a way to avoid cabin fever," she says. "It's more a family event than a kids event."

The Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum is at 54 S. Loudoun St. in Winchester. Admission is \$5, but children under 2 are admitted free. Hours are from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and from 1 to 5 p.m. on Sunday. Call 722-2020 or visit the Web at [www.discoverymuseum.net](http://www.discoverymuseum.net) for more information. Call 984-8200 for more information about the "Bust the Winter Blues" Children's Party.

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