

TASK 1: Summarise in 1 or 2 sentences what the talk is about.

Suggested answer: The talk is about coping with boredom and the speaker illustrates this by giving a mission to Mars as an example and ends with advice to parents.

TASK 2: What does the speaker comment on boredom and what advice does he give?

- 1 Boredom as a significant challenge in long space missions discussed.
- 2 Mars mission's extensive duration and limited entertainment pose psychological challenges.
- 3 European Space Agency conducts a simulation with volunteers to study boredom.
- 4 Insight into individual behaviour and group dynamics crucial for Mars missions.
- 5 Tensions on Mars trips likely to surface during moments of boredom.
- 6 Dissatisfaction with limited variety of food and infrequent contact expected.
- 7 Various types of boredom explored, including situational and repetitive boredom.
- 8 Dr Svensson suggests boredom stems from a lack of personal meaning.
- 9 Research shows social interactivity, not just excitement, counters boredom.
- 10 Parents advised to focus on social activities to combat children's boredom.

How many points did you say?

#### TAPESCRIPT

Today, we're talking about boredom. What is it, and how can we cope with it? Now, if I said, how would you like to go on a space mission to find out more about the planet Mars, you'd probably find the prospect quite thrilling, and I think it's unlikely that you'd say, oh no, how boring.

But in actual fact, boredom is likely to be one of the biggest challenges for people going on such a mission. Mars, after all, is a long way away, and the round trip will take around 17 months, rather a long time to spend in a small spaceship where there's little in the way of entertainment.

What's more, add on the training and preparation stages, and you'd probably be giving up two to three years of your life to such a project, so you'd need to be pretty committed to it. But it's coping with the boredom of the actual trip that interests the European Space Agency, so they've set up a simulation.

They're locking 12 volunteers up in just such a small space for exactly that length of time in order to study how they'll cope with the boredom. The aim is to gain insight into both individual human behaviour and group dynamics under the kinds of conditions astronauts would experience on a mission to Mars.

On the real trip, lack of space, lack of privacy, a high workload and the stress associated with mechanical breakdowns etc. will all lead to all sorts of tensions. But it is thought that these tensions will actually come to the surface when the astronauts have less to do.

In moments of boredom, therefore, dissatisfaction concerning the limited variety of available food or the infrequent nature of contact with family and friends may well become the focus of the astronauts' feelings.

So what is boredom? Well, there is actually more than one type. There are, for example, activities such as listening to a boring lecture, or waiting for a delayed plane in an airport, which tend to be of a temporary nature.

This situational boredom contrasts with the boredom of a routine job, for example, where something that in itself may be interesting the first time you do it becomes boring when you have to do it over and over again.

This we can define as repetitive boredom. But it's hard to grasp the concept of boredom itself because it doesn't really have any qualities of its own. Dr Svensson, author of the book *The Philosophy of Boredom*, talks about a lack of personal meaning as perhaps summing up what boredom is.

Other researchers have looked at how boredom affects people to determine whether some personality types cope better than others. What they have found is that people often assume that the opposite of boredom is excitement.

That's why parents take their bored children to a theme park. But often, boredom is more to do with lack of social interactivity than it has to do with lack of physical activity or thrill. So parents might be better off taking their children on a picnic where they would meet new people and make their own entertainment.

So clearly boredom is something that we have to take into account.