

Bored children may land in jail, juvenile officer says

By JEAN HENKHAUS
Too much free time can bore children, and what's worse, it may land them in jail, says Sgt. Gene Rothen, juvenile officer for the College Station Police Department.
"Too many of the kids who get in trouble have too much free time, and they're bored with it," Rothen said. "They're looking for something to do."
Rothen handles an estimated 20 cases involving delinquent youth every month.
"Some kids just mess up that one time, but they get caught," Rothen said.
Theft is one of the most common crimes committed, Rothen said. Although some shoplifters have enough money to pay for the item they have taken, Rothen said that this is not the case with young people.

insure that the rights of the child are not abused.
Even after confessing to a crime, the juvenile must appear before a judge several times to make sure that his rights haven't been violated. Law enforcement officers are not allowed to be in the room when confessions are signed.
Rothen said that becoming involved in activities or organizations help to keep kids out of trouble.
Rothen said he thinks participation in sports can be especially beneficial.
"If a boy is playing football, he's going to have to spend a little of his time after school practicing," Rothen said. "Usually by the time he's finished practicing, he's too tired to go out and get in trouble."
Rothen deals not only with kids, but also with their parents.
The presence of parents can be

especially effective on the young people, particularly in first offense cases.
"A lot of kids would rather be thrown in jail than have their parents know they've been caught stealing," Rothen said. "When you bring their parents in, it shames them—or shocks them to the degree that most of them don't ever do it again."
Being the only member of the Juvenile Unit, Rothen said he is usually kept busy.
If the city keeps growing like it is now, Rothen said that he thinks the department will have to expand.
Rothen also gives lectures and educational programs in school, but Rothen said he likes working with kids best.
"Working with juveniles is a big challenge. I guess that's the main thing—the challenge of it."

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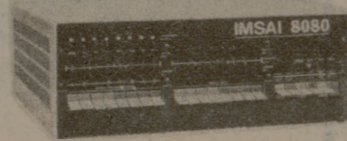
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