

Designing Spaces for Kids

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Homes with families that include children often require flexibility, fun and a little style.



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Three key takeaways:

- Parents often keep their children in mind when considering all the space in a home.
- Design trends have changed to accommodate more modern tastes and uses of space.
- Space needs to be flexible and able to accommodate changing tastes and needs as children grow older.

Think of it as a friendly invasion. Kids may sleep in their bedrooms and enjoy some activities there, but rarely use the space to play games, practice an instrument or work on homework. When shopping for a home or designing a space, parents often have their children top of mind. Aside from spa-like bathrooms or basement mancaves, parents often view a home's entire square footage and yard as space for kids to use.

Families need homes to manage the constant transition inherent to raising children. While young kids want to be with their parents most of the time, older kids may prefer more solitude in a space other than their bedroom. And then there's a need to balance family time (and screen time). For some parents, group activities help curtail children's screen time, says Amanda Wiss, founder, New York City-based [Urban Clarity](#), a home organization and staging firm.

Child development expert Stephanie Allison of Boston-based [Childish](#), who helps design and organize for children's needs, adds, "How the room is designed and set up has a huge psychological and emotional impact on the child."

Bedrooms for Sanctuary, Rest

Bedrooms are now less of a hangout space for kids. While some seek themes to inspire design, kids rooms are leaning toward motifs offering flexibility so they won't need replacing when interests mature. Randi Edelman, founder of Philadelphia-based [REMY Creative](#), likes to develop a plan to work for at least five years. Designer Liz Lapan of Pensacola, Fla.-based [In Detail Interiors](#) says the firm might add an age-appropriate feature like a climbing wall or adjustable bookshelves to match a child's height.

For some girls, designers are fielding requests for a refreshed preppy look, updated with pink and orange colors and organic accents, says Edelman. Social media is also influencing design choices like a vanity with Hollywood-style lights where they practice mimicking a viral TikTok skincare or makeup routine, she says.

For boys, it's a gamer setup, with a monitor to play video games. Sneaker displays are also popular, as are graffiti walls, which Edelman likes to do on wallpaper rather than so the wall itself, so they're easier to replace.

However bedrooms are used, they should offer sanctuary, shelter and ownership, with parents asking kids about color palettes for posters or decals, says Diana Melichar, an architect at [Melichar Architects](#) based in Lake Forest, Ill.

Spare Rooms to Spread Out

While rooms used to serve multiple purposes, Boston-based real estate salesperson Daryl Cohan of [Compass](#) says she's seeing more spaces dedicated to specific functions. Some nooks, crannies and hallways can be repurposed for many needs. Soundproofing by a specialist may be smart if drumming or other loud music will take place, says Cohan. In new builds, it's easier to handle such requests before walls are closed up, says Lapan. "Textiles can help, and we have lined walls with plywood when clients are very sensitive about noise transmission," she says. Cohan says she's seeing more dedicated homework spaces minus a desk. "All they need is a laptop, comfortable chair, good lighting and semi-quiet area without a TV so it's free from distraction," she says.

For crafts rooms, a sink and waterproof floor make cleanup easier. And since hanging out with friends has always proven a favorite activity, Edelman has added her professional spin to kid lounges by making them stylish and user friendly with easy-care surfaces and fabrics to welcome snacks and pets. Having friends stay overnight can be more fun when the choice is a bunk room, something Evanston, Ill.-based Morgante Wilson Architects' design team has done.

Shared Spaces to Gather

One reason bedrooms are less magnetic is that many parents want to have family members spend time together, says designer Desiree Kludy of [Design Key Studio – Decorating Den Interiors](#) in Cooper City, Fla. With popular open-plan concepts, it's easier for multiple generations to enjoy different activities like watching movies or playing boardgames, in the same space. It also allows parents to keep an eye on smaller children. Partitions of some kind offer some privacy, says Wiss. Activity corners can be set up like classrooms, says Allison, who has heard parents tell her they want a cozy nook, big movement area or reading corner.

Basements can serve these functions well too and work well for older children. Designer Natalie Cox with Ottawa-based CPI Interiors, [Decorating Den](#), found her own children were ready to do so once they were nine and 10. Melichar's firm is transforming many basements, adding small kitchens, bars and game tables. Architect Bob Zuber, AIA, partner with [Morgante Wilson Architects](#), has redesigned multiple basements with areas cordoned off for a basketball court, ping-pong table and weight room. One Boston-area family transformed theirs during the pandemic with a TV, couch, playground and craft supplies. One advantage of lower-level spaces, Melichar says, is they can be left messier since they're not readily in view. For homes without basement, Kludy says garages can be converted.

Outdoor Space for Activity

Outside activities encourage family togetherness, from cooking to eating, swimming, basketball, pickleball and gardening, says Cohan. More parents are adding small water features, swing sets and playhouses for younger children. Allison stresses the rewards of imaginative play encouraging creativity. Examples include building fairy houses and tents with foliage debris. "The key is to make kids feel welcome, so they stay home and have friends over," Cohan says.



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