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## **Creating a Special Room for your Child**

Many parents face the dilemma of allowing their children the freedom to spread out their play area over the entire house only to be faced with embarrassment when a guest enters the front door into a preschool outreach program. The trick is to have a designated and confined toy area, so that there is always a place to sit down and a horizontal surface on which to place a book or a cup of tea. No one wants to make a child feel like a guest in his/her own home. A well-designed kid's room or play area will alleviate a large amount of the stress and mess in the household and allow every family member space to relax.

A child's bedroom, which has well-planned storage and space for creative projects, will give the child a sense of his or her own place and encourages the child to play in that area. Here are some tips for designing a kid-friendly room.

**Soundproofing:** Using soft carpet and fabric window coverings and even upholstering the walls (i.e., applying fabric over polyester batting) can significantly reduce the transmission of music, TV or play noise into the rest of the house. Applying corkboard to one wall to make a large area for adhering art projects, posters calendars and sports (or Pokemon) cards keeps the paper clutter centralized and also dampens noise.

**Storage:** During the past 20 years the size of bedrooms in tract homes has been steadily shrinking in order to add more floor space to the public areas. Closet organizers have evolved from a perk for the affluent to a "must-have" practical item for any home. Closet organizers can foster a sense of self-reliance and neatness in a child if the racks for the clothes are set at a height the child can reach. Lightweight wire or plastic bins on rollers or built into the closet provide an "out-of-sight" treasure chest for the child's clutter. A 30 by 30-inch ottoman can be fitted with casters and a safety hinged lid for storing toys and books or extra bed linens. If the ottoman has a laminate top it will serve extra duty as seating or as a work surface for toddlers. Window seats can be built into a bay with sliding cabinet doors on the front for easy access to storage. For collections, trophies or infrequently used toys and books, install a plate rail (a 6 to 10" wide shelf) around the room 18-24" below the ceiling.



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**Furniture:** As with all furniture, investing in a few good quality pieces is the smartest move for long term durability. Generic looking furniture (white painted or laminate) can be personalized as the child grows up with unusual knobs or by painting the fronts of the drawers with contrasting colors. Upholstered pieces should have stain resistant washable fabric covers. A second hand table with the legs shortened will make a terrific project table for a child. The child can even help “refinish” second hand furniture with stencils and paints. A common childhood activity, especially with pre-teen girls, is the “sleep-over.”

Consider a trundle bed or a futon chair that folds out to make a twin bed for over night guests. A twin platform bed can be built into one end of the room with a headboard cabinet and a footboard that is deep enough to serve as book storage and a desk. Every child needs a desk large enough to accommodate school projects or to use the computer. Make sure the desk and chair heights are comfortable for the child, or he/she will return to drawing on the rug.

**Lighting:** Every room needs both ambient (or indirect) and task (or direct) lighting. Ambient lighting should come from ceiling fixtures or track lights; direct lighting from fixtures directed at the work surfaces and reading areas. One lighting solution to be avoided in a child’s room is halogen wall sconces or floor torchers. Halogen bulbs are very hot and will start a fire if a toy gets tossed up into the fixture. The torchers are easily knocked over and can set fires or cause nasty burns. Clip-on lights for headboards and bookshelves around a desk are an inexpensive way to get direct light without sacrificing floor space. Halogen lights can be used in track or recessed lighting, and they provide very good illumination from a long distance.

**Wall coverings:** As children age their interests shift almost as quickly as they outgrow their shoes. Selecting a wall covering with longevity can be a challenge. Many people opt for scrubbable paint on the walls (eggshell finish) and colorful border at the ceiling. If the room has a cathedral ceiling, dormers or other interesting architectural features, using two colors of paint on the walls can enhance these features. Use an accent color on the wall with the most visual impact, and paint the other three walls a second color. If your children have a creative flair you can install chair rail molding at the level of the windowsills all the way around the room. Paint the walls above the rail and use blackboard paint below to give a place for the kids to draw with chalk. There are also some children’s wallpapers that have 30” high scenes designed for use on the bottom of the wall. These can have static adhering cutouts of car, trucks, animals, and



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spaceships that the child can play with while sitting on the floor.

**Window coverings:** Easy cleaning and trouble free operation are the two most important features of window coverings in a child's room. The inexpensive miniblinds found in most homes bend when they are struck with a toy, bind and drag when they are operated and collect dust that drifts off the blind when they are raised and lowered. Better alternatives are fabric pleated shades or duettes, which come in weaves dark enough to allow for mid-day napping. Most of these products are made with an anti-static material to keep dust from collecting on them. When they do get dirty, they can be washed in the bathtub with mild detergent and hung up to dry.

A continuous loop control and a clutch in the headrail make the shade easy for a child to operate. Finally, cotton valance or rod covers can pick up the decorative theme of the room. Using details like shells, blocks, or buttons on the trim of the valances in an easy way to customize a ready-made valance.

Decorating a child's space should incorporate practicality and durability with design concepts that are appropriate to the age of the child. Often a child's interests, such as trucks, dinosaurs, ballerinas or racecars, can be the starting point for the theme, color and accessories for the room. Children over the age of 5 can and should be involved in the decorating process. Keep it simple and fun by limiting their choices to three or fewer options. Remember that as they grow up their likes and dislikes may alter dramatically, but a change in the wall paint color and new bedding can make the transition economical if the room is built around good quality furnishings.

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