

Learn How to SHARE INDOOR SPACE With Children

Having a child is a life-changing experience. You get to see a little person grow into an adult. You experience the unconditional love of a child. And you get to have your home overrun by toys, gizmos, and other products designed to occupy young minds.

That's right, once you share your space with a child, get used to having a lot more "stuff." However, this new stuff doesn't have to consume your lifestyle. By instituting a few strategies, you can coexist happily with your child — and his or her things — no matter how old he may be.

BIRTH TO TODDLER

Kids these days have plenty of products designed to keep them entertained. From bouncing seats, to exercise saucers, to doorway jumpers, a baby registry can be filled with dozens of items. Factor in play yards, bassinets, changing

stations and stuffed animals galore and it's no surprise that your home is consumed with clutter.

Relax. No one expects a new mom's home, or the home of one chasing after a toddler on-the-go, to be the picture of organization. Yet there are ways you can make these baby items comfortably fit into your home.

- **Consider design.** With a host of colors and patterns available, you may likely find a swing, high chair or play yard that will blend into your home décor, making it less of an eyesore.

- **Look for portability.** Many items fold up for storage or can easily move from room to room. If company is dropping by, condense and move items to closets or out of sight.

- **Buy items that grow with your child.** Look for things that can be modified to accommodate your child as he or she gets big-



Lyster captured the Groovy Girl theme in this room in which he created an eye-popping and colorful décor recently.

ger. A jumper whose height adjusts, a bouncer that converts to a toddler chair or even a crib that turns into a bed will eliminate the need to purchase new things as your child develops - eliminating further clutter.

- **Set aside a play space.** If you have enough room, set up a play area or room where you can house the bulkier items, such as a family room or finished basement. This way, your living space won't be compromised. Limit play to these designated spaces and make toys off-limits in the living room, office or kitchen.

SCHOOL AGE

As your child gets older, he or she can become responsible for controlling clutter.

- **Make cleaning up a family affair.** Establishing these strategies early on can help you greatly. Otherwise, you might inadvertently train your child to be slovenly. Tidiness is a learned trait, and one that should be illustrated and practiced by you as well.

- **Have bins on hand.** If you don't want to be as structured, consider purchasing or making personalized cleanup bins with your child's name stenciled on the front. This way, when it's time to

round up errant toys, he or she can pack up the bin and then move them to a storage container.

- **Specialty items are fantastic.** Look for things that won't destroy your living spaces. There are a host of products now, like markers and paints, that only work on special paper or that are washable. This means your walls and furniture won't be marked up with your child's latest artistic creation.

OTHER GOOD STRATEGIES

- Having children means having a home full of life. Rarely will your home be spotless. Accepting that you'll have to make some compromises will make it easier to deal with.

- It's not a "whose-home-is-the-cleanest" competition. Don't compare your house to a friend's or to that of an older couple with no children.

- **Set aside space for you.** Your bedroom, a bathroom or a den might be the ideal retreat to keep free of kiddie stuff. You can retire there when you take a much-needed break.

- **Indulge once and a while.** If guests offer to help straighten up, accept willingly. Or plan a room





what type of room you want to create. "I can assist with ideas and help the customer follow through with those ideas," says Lyster. While Lyster doesn't sell furnishings, he has carpenters and electricians to assist with creating a special room. "The electrician can create both soft mood lights and bright task lighting to match the child's needs. I recommend they start by searching out some things they want in the room, like a special piece

of furniture and then we'll follow through with a décor to match that piece or theme," Lyster says. Lyster has created a few rooms he is especially proud of. One was for a middle-school swimmer in Neenah who loves water. She found a photo of a beach scene in a magazine and decided that's the look she wanted Lyster to create.

remodel so that you're doing something for yourself. If finances permit, hire a cleaning service to come in and help you with the chores that don't need to be done as often, such as cleaning out the refrigerator or vacuuming the couch.

Mike Lyster of Mike Lyster Painting & Wallcovering Inc., Oshkosh, feels when decorating a child's room, the whole room becomes the canvas. But, he adds, you must understand what you're going after,



"We were called in to create a scene—a one-wall mural and then ended up doing the whole room. Lyster and his team placed her bed in the center of a "sandy island." They used paint shades of Caribbean blues and greens with a golden sand color on the lower walls. Palm trees were added and a surf board was painted on the walls. Tiny lights were strung in the trees for a special beach mood. Lyster then suggested elements to tie it all in like window shades and bamboo curtains to support the beach cabana theme. "It's the little things, the inexpensive elements that really support a complete theme," Lyster says.

Another room had a "Groovy Girl" theme (see photo) for a grad school girl. Lyster met with mom and daughter and worked out the room's scheme, using purple shag carpeting and fabrics reminiscent of the 1970s psychedelic style to coordinate with the Groovy Girl theme.

Lyster says prices vary but a budget can be developed based on the complexity of the work.