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Space for Kids

By Jennifer Plantier
Copley News Service

Creating a wonderful environment for a child's room involves more than the regular elements of interior design. Unlike adding a kitchen or bathroom, it's also a forum for kids to express their ideas, explore their self-image and build on a parent/child relationship.

Involving children in choices and trying to incorporate their interests and preferences is the key to success. And what a challenge for any adult/child team - to create a personal space that is both fun and functional.

COLORFUL CHOICES

Color researchers point to a number of physiological responses to color - and suggest that each person responds to color in his own way. It follows that kids should be allowed to pick their own color preferences - as they just may be filling some personal need at a given time. Use paint samples to help them zero in on the specific colors and intensities that brighten their outlook.

Some specialists suggest that a more neutral background with subtle colors and textures works well with the many colorful toys and accessories collected over time. Too much vivid color can overload the senses.

Diversity may be the best choice - after all, the world is not done entirely in pastels or even primaries. Try to include a number of different textures, colors, shapes, tastes and styles in the spaces where children play pretend and rest up for the next day's adventures.

Theme rooms seem like a natural choice for children, given their preoccupation with certain characters and activities. But keep in mind how many of these preoccupations are short-lived and replaced by others in the span of weeks. This is the best of reasons not to go overboard with any one theme. A child's dream space could become an eyesore even before the paint dries.

One resolution may be to play up a theme with minimal expense, just so it won't be so frustrating when they move on to the next source of fascination. Wallpaper borders, stencils, removable wall decorations and window treatments are inexpensive details that are easy to put up - and take down when the time comes.

With this strategy parents can encourage their children of any age to

change their environment and experiment with new tastes.

FUN FURNISHINGS

As the bulk of investment in any room, the furnishings require a lot of thought. You'll want them to work for the long term, so select a style and a finish that is versatile and that you can all live with for years to come.

When shopping for furniture, consider not only the size and style but also the workmanship of a piece. If your budget is on the low side, quality secondhand pieces may be a better option than poorly made inexpensive ones.

All furniture should have a detectable function other than decoration - beds, dressers and night stands for storage, bookshelves and desks are standard items. Easy-to-use hardware, drawer glides and other features that make them easy for a child to access are best.

Items that adapt to growing children or perform two functions work a double shift. Consider cribs that convert to single beds, trundle beds that can sleep guests and be used for storage, window seats that house toy chests underneath.

SAFE SOLUTIONS

When it comes to children, safety always comes ahead of style. Keep the following tips in mind when designing a safe living space for your little ones.

- Buy furniture that meet current safety regulations. Check heirloom pieces (especially cribs) carefully for hazards or put them away for later use. All furniture should also be sturdy enough to fend off the most active children. Toy and storage chests should have safety hinges, plenty of ventilation and no locking devices.

- Buy furniture with rounded edges or use corner guards for extra protections.

- Use guardrails to keep young children from falling out of bed.

- Avoid slippery floor coverings.

- Make sure there are no climbable objects under windows, and the window-covering cords are fastened out of reach (to protect from strangulation).

- Cover all electrical outlets with safety plugs or plates.

A safe and stimulating environment is every parent's ultimate goal. A team effort and some imagination will result in a versatile room that no child will want to grow out of.

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