

today's lesson



Designing

for

Children

Make the next generation the focus of a remodel.

By Amanda Marlow

Parents are becoming more child conscious in every aspect of their lives; from vehicles with automatic opening doors and safety features to houses that encourage creative learning environments. With the increased security risks we face every day, safety has become a huge concern, causing parents to desire what is called a controlled environment. This can include securing property with fences and even making the home a one-stop shop with amenities such as a full basketball court, tennis court, and entertainment room. This way, kids can have fun and be active while staying under parental supervision. Obviously, not everyone can afford this. Fortunately, there are many ways to make your home more child-friendly without emptying your pockets.

Busy parents are trying to stay more actively involved in their children's lives. Many parents move away from the large amount of time children spend on the computer and watching TV and return to the fundamentals of art, reading, and music to encourage creative development with hands-on activities. This can include sensory tables with sand and water; art areas with easels, paints, chalk, and crayons; and music areas, which are well-insulated rooms for activities like piano playing, voice lessons, and drum practice. These are ideas that are simple to incorporate into any home, and will encourage an atmosphere of fun and creativity that you can enjoy with your children.

Whether for the art room, music room, or toy room, there becomes more of a need for designated storage spaces. Due to the fact that toys have evolved from tinker toys, coloring books, and G.I. Joe to large kitchen sets, art easels, and riding toys, more room is needed. With so many larger scale toys and activities, storage spaces are an ideal way to keep a home free of clutter while keeping everything accessible.



kitchens

When designing a kitchen to be kid-friendly, cooktops in the island are not usually desired. The close proximity of children sitting at the island to the cooktop increases the risk of burns. For an added safety feature, specify an induction cooktop, which uses a strong electromagnet that transfers, or induces, electromagnetic energy into any piece of relatively magnetic material, such



Microwave heights are recommended to be built-in at or above counter height. A microwave built into the island can be a welcome convenience for older children, but a safety issue for smaller kids.

According to Pat Grieg, Account Manager at Guyer's of Plymouth, Minnesota, there are many models of dishwashers, microwaves, and ovens that have a child lock-out switch option. This disables the appliance from being turned on, even if a child is pushing buttons and flipping switches. Additionally, many dishwashers turn the washer arms off when the door is opened. ASKO dishwashers have a lock on the outside to prevent children from even opening the door.

Stainless steel is becoming less popular in homes with children because it fingerprints easily and magnets don't stick to it. Whirlpool and Frigidaire have come out with new lines of appliances that look like stainless steel, but accept magnets and do not fingerprint. Whirlpool created "Satina" and Frigidaire has a line called "Easy Care"—both combine the aesthetics of stainless steel with these kid-friendly options. ▶▶

One idea to keep in mind is that remodeling for children is not age specific—a smart trend involves designing to grow. You've probably seen this idea emerging in toys, potty chairs, and car seats, but thinking on a larger scale can help you get the most out of your home remodel, which can also help justify the cost. For example, homeowners can remodel their basement into a play room for their current preschooler, but design it to accommodate an entertainment area as the child becomes a pre-teen and teenager with an active lifestyle.

Some grandparents are even incorporating designs to accommodate their growing families and grandchildren. By finishing a basement with a guest bedroom or adding a bathroom, their children and new families can come visit and enjoy a more comfortable stay.

The specific design elements you'll use when designing with children in mind will vary greatly depending on the type of room you're remodeling.

as an iron skillet, that's placed on an active induction cooktop. This magnetic energy causes the cookware to become hot—even though the induction cooking surface feels cool to the touch—a very kid-friendly technology. Induction cooktops are now offered by many manufacturers, such as Bosch, Electrolux, Diva, GE, Miele, Sub-Zero/Wolf, Thermador, and Viking.

Note, however, that induction cooktops only work with cookware made of ferrous metals (those that contain iron), such as iron and steel. Aluminum, copper, and glass simply won't get hot because they can't sustain a sufficient magnetic field. Also note that a child can still burn his or her hand by touching ferrous cookware when it's in the process of being "heated" by an induction cooktop.

mudrooms

Mudrooms are very convenient areas for families. Cubbies, flip top benches, hooks, and lockers make it easy to keep the mess contained, as well as teach kids to hang up their coats and put their mittens, hats, and boots away right when they come in.

The most practical place for a mudroom is near the access to the garage or near the main entrance. This helps avoid mud and snow being tracked through the home. If the mudroom is also near the laundry room and a bathroom/powder room, it creates ease of clean-up for children who like to play in the dirt—as most kids do! If they need to run inside to go to the bathroom, it's easily accessible, and if they come in from playing in the snow or playing sports where they're dirty, clothes can go directly in the laundry room, keeping the mess (and the smell) contained.

Because any home with children tends to see more messes in the mudroom, kitchen, laundry room, and bathrooms, easy to clean floors like tile, Marmoleum, and wood are recommended.



other spaces

Many families are designing additional garage stalls for their teenage drivers, as well as extra storage space for outdoor toys and sports equipment.

Replacing old hardware on doors to handles with privacy locks makes it impossible for children to lock themselves in a room, as the door can be opened from the outside with a small metal pin that unlocks it. This is important so parents have access to their children in case of emergency, even if the door is locked.

Defining a computer space located near parents' spaces is becoming a popular trend. Desks are being put in the kitchen or family room as a way for parents to monitor web access. This is also convenient for helping children with homework as technology is becoming a necessity for school projects. Parents can cook or clean while remaining available to children for questions and help.

Having direct access to the backyard is another big concern for parents. Installing French doors creates an environment where parents have a large view to see their children playing, as well as have easy access to them. ▶▶

basements, bedrooms, attics, and lofts

Defining entertainment areas was driven by kids and advances in technology. Having a basement entertainment area as a designated place for video games and surround-sound speakers creates a more peaceful home. There can be a living room upstairs that's a sanctuary from the noise and chaos so grownups (or children who need a break from the noise or are tired) can have a sense of having their own space. The basement playroom/entertainment area creates a kind of indoor clubhouse feel. Sound-proof ceilings also work well in these areas.

Bars are a common trend in basements, but a new play on this is creating a kitchenette area with a fridge and microwave. This way, the area can serve as a place for kids and their friends to make easy snacks and grab drinks, and can easily transform into a fun place for adults to entertain.

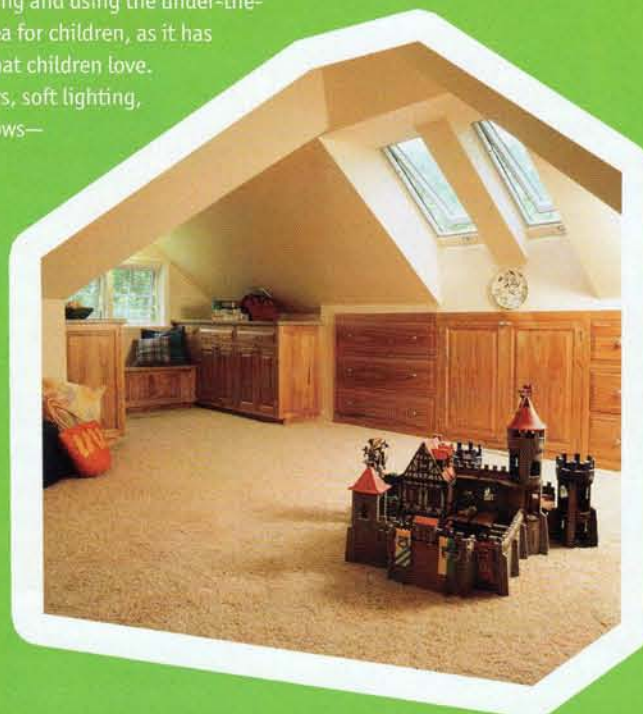
Gas fireplaces are being installed in place of wood-burning fireplaces because of their safety and convenience.

Attractive cabinet built-ins for toys and storage can help keep the area clutter-free.

These are made to accommodate any storage needs through combinations of doors, cubbies, and drawer combos with full extension hinges—including deep drawers for games and larger toys, in addition to shallow drawers for art supplies.

Many people are finishing and using the under-the-stairs area as a play area for children, as it has that secret, cozy feel that children love. Design it with fun colors, soft lighting, plush flooring and pillows—your child will have a space all their own.

In recent years, there has been an increase in designated playrooms, whether in the attic, basement, or loft. Installing warm, plush carpeting in these areas creates a safer and more comfortable environment, especially for small children who crawl, play, and tumble on the floor.



bathrooms

Bathrooms are being added in basements and other levels of the home. For ease of access, locate a bathroom near children's play areas, as well as near bedrooms. Another smart idea is to have a bathroom in the basement close to a walkout patio entrance. Natural or stained woodwork is well suited for children, as painted white cabinetry shows fingerprints and smudges.

Granite and Cambria are recommended for countertops in bathrooms, as well as in kitchens, because they are durable and easy to clean. Undermount sinks are especially popular because messes can be wiped right in, whereas lipped sinks are harder to clean for busy moms and children.

Many families are incorporating the Jack and Jill bathrooms for their children. The colors used in these spaces are more vibrant and exciting, and can be incorporated on the walls and in countertop choices. Wood or tile wainscoting is recommended for child-friendly areas, as it wears better against toys, tricycles, and splashing water than sheetrock.

Kohler has created a toilet that incorporates a potty chair—the Transitions Quiet-Close Toilet Seat. It has a flip-up lid, and two flip-up seats. The one on top is a smaller seat, so children can sit comfortably, and the normal-sized seat is below for adults. According to Karen Dinius of Dinius Plumbing in White Bear Lake, Minnesota, the seats are simple to remove for ease of cleaning. It helps create a smooth transition, teaching children to use the toilet.

Every family's home needs a tub for bathing children, so a home should have a tub in at least one bathroom. Handheld shower spouts are popular with parents to help with ease of bathing children, particularly washing their hair. Flip-top benches are also helpful near the tub in bathrooms, to create a comfortable place for parents to sit.



laundry rooms

The typical place for laundry rooms used to be the basement. Thankfully, this inconvenience is over—now many people are moving laundry rooms to the first and second floors, closer to the bedrooms. This creates a wonderful solution for parents with small children who don't want to be walking up and down stairs with laundry baskets, but also don't want to leave their toddlers or infants upstairs alone. Moving the laundry room to a more accessible first or second floor location creates a family-friendly solution.

Today's active parents are no longer cleaning up after their kids who are old enough to clean up after themselves, especially when it comes to doing their own laundry. This helps teach kids responsibility. And when the laundry room is located on the first or second floor, it makes it accessible and convenient for everyone to use.



codes related to children

Codes include specifications for steps in regards to the length and width of risers and treads, to prevent the steps from being too steep. This helps protect families, especially small children, who tend to run more and lose their balance more often.

Egress windows are required in basements that aren't walk-outs. This allows firemen and other emergency services personnel access to the home if they can't get in through the doors. Cities have also figured out that if a basement is nice enough, people convert rooms into sleeping areas for older children or teenagers, in which case a safe fire/emergency evacuation route is an absolute necessity.

Railings have to return to the wall at the top and bottom so that clothing does not get caught and trip people going up or down. The distance between the spindles cannot be more than 4 inches; this prevents children from climbing through or getting their heads stuck between the spindles. The railings also have to be at least 36 inches high so children can't boost themselves over the railing where they could fall. In addition, there must be one smoke detector in every bedroom, one in every hallway to a bedroom, and at least one on every floor.

Newly installed glass in bathroom mirrors and windows has to be tempered. This means it would crack safely (like a windshield) instead of into dangerous shards if it were to break. Showers and tubs with handheld showers must be pressure balanced to prevent scalding. ■

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tips for remodeling with children

- Keep children and pets away from construction areas. Choose a company that will keep all tools and materials picked up and in designated places. A construction area is never a safe place for children or pets to play.
- Work with a company that is respectful of your family, home, and property. Make sure floor protection and dust barriers are put down before and during construction to help keep the area clean and safe.
- Make sure the company you choose has designated working hours and lets you know in advance who will be there and when. Being aware of the schedule allows you to take any necessary precautions with children or pets.
- Make sure you get accurate, detailed pricing specific to your home and project from the remodeling company before you sign a contract. This allows you to control the budget for your family's unique needs.
- If you're remodeling a kitchen or bathroom, look into temporary options to be put in place during construction. This can help alleviate the stress of being without a kitchen or bathroom during the construction process.