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so much stuff, so little space

The art to creating kids' spaces the whole family can enjoy

by Ashley Wells



You're excited to build friendships for both you and your littles, so you pack up your kids and head to a new friend's house for a playdate. You walk into a beautifully-designed home and notice there are no Barbies peeking out from corners, no trucks shoved under couches, no legos to avoid stepping on — just a cohesive, functional living space. Cleaning your own house usually involves shoving every toy you own into an already overflowing closet. Are these people minimalists, or have they uncovered some mystical secret of organization?

Turns out, it's no secret. It just takes a little discipline, a few creative design solutions and some family cooperation. We talked

Photo courtesy of the redesign company



Photo courtesy of Calli Fox



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with two Charlotte-area designers to round up five helpful tips for creating a dream space both you and your littles will love.

KEEP ONLY WHAT YOU LOVE

Let's face it. If you're (re)organizing your home to rein in the flood of toys taking over your living spaces, you've got too many. Christina Britt Lewis of The Redesign Company pulls her inspiration from William Morris: "Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful." This applies to kids' stuff, too. Lewis, who has more than 12 years of design experience under her belt, says, "Teach this to your kids from the

get-go, and they will never have storage problems." Too much isn't just overwhelming for you — it's overwhelming for your kids, too. Purge and pass on. Only keep what you love. Make a game of going through old toys and giving some away, especially around birthdays and holidays when you know a new influx is inevitable.

FUNCTION THAT SERVES THE WHOLE FAMILY

Instead of thinking of your house in sections — as "kid space" and "adult space," think about creating rooms that are inviting and functional for the whole family. Calli Fox, a mother with a flair for design, ran into difficulties designing around

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her kids' toys while keeping her small home stylish. Fox suggests items that appeal to the eye but can also be used for play. A teepee for the kids can be used as a reading nook or a fun fort. Pair it with a fur rug and fill it with blankets and pillows to design a corner that's cozy but still stylish. Lots of toys can serve as both decor and fun. A neutral-colored wooden play kitchen fits nicely next to adult furniture. Place vintage wooden trains or cars on bookshelves. Incorporate candid pictures of your children playing to celebrate play as an art of childhood.

EVERYTHING HAS ITS PLACE

This is the perfect opportunity to teach your kids how to organize. Carve out a place for each group of toys or crafts, label it and return it as soon as they're done playing with an item. "You know how lots of kids, and grownups, prefer food on their plate to all be separate and not touch?" asks Lewis. "Think of toys the same way. Playing is more fun when they know exactly where everything is, and cleanup is easy when they know exactly where everything goes."

Get creative here. You may never have the space you need, but utilize what you have. Remember, your kids



Photo courtesy of the redesign company

are using these items, so functional but inexpensive furniture is the way to go. Shelving units from Ikea make storage easy. Wicker baskets filled with toys slide onto shelves or sit beautifully by the fireplace. Use glass jars found at Homegoods to display crayons and markers. Clear out a cabinet in the kitchen to store paints, arts and crafts. Roll bins under or behind couches, hide toys inside TV consoles or use storage ottomans.

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

Don't strive to make the room "Pinterest perfect." Add features

that function for your space and your family. Seek inspiration, but make it your own. "You can find a lot of rooms you love on Pinterest and Instagram," says Fox. "But you will feel more welcome and cozy when you add your own touch." Start by picking a design theme — maybe neutrals, boho chic or modern. Whatever fits best within your home. Then mix and match the way you see fit.

HAVE FUN

Cleaning with kids can be a chore in and of itself. Instead, make it a game, and have fun.

Sing a song, have a race, put on a timer to see how quickly you can get things back in order. Make it part of the daily routine. "We can choose to make it fun. We can be our own solution," says Lewis. This space is for playing, entertaining and enjoying each other as a family, so don't lose site of the fun when decorating. "Allow kids to help with decorating, and be proud of what you've created together," suggests Fox. "The more fun you have, the more you will enjoy the beautiful space you've created together." **HID**



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