



Small house, many children: How to give kids personal space

Humans are territorial and want some control over their belongings and the space where they are kept. We love to nest and this is the beginning of that behaviour for children. This begins around age 2 when they begin to learn the concept of “mine!” 3-year-olds don’t have as many belongings or privacy issues as a preteen. They still need a bit of space but not as much as an older child.

Each child can have their own space in a house – perhaps “their” shelf in a bathroom, or their cupboard or drawer in the kitchen. A corner to themselves if they have to share a room, or a blocked off area of the family or living room that is totally theirs to control.

Many children under age twelve share rooms. There is a lot of upsides to this. Room sharing helps kids sleep when they are experiencing separation anxiety from parents or fears of the dark. Having someone else is nice and comforting. It facilitates play as they can share toys and games and it obviously saves space when siblings share a room. Toy clean-up is easier if toys are taken to one room. It is the same with laundry.

The downside of room sharing is that kids are harder to settle down for bedtime as they want to play, talk or wind each other up in a game of the sillies. One child may want to read while the other wants to go to sleep. Noise, light and activity such as sleepovers are all sources of conflict and problem-solving. One child might be messy and the other neat. Children should be allowed to control how messy or neat their space is. It’s theirs after all. Communal areas should be kept to the overall standards of the house.

Children can have separate shelves, areas of the closet, and areas in a shared room. Obviously, the bed and space underneath can be personal space, but also bookcases and wall space can be designated as their own without having to put masking tape down on the floor to designate boundaries. Boundaries should be discussed among children so that each knows what area is off limits and what is communal space. Have a rule that permission must be received before a sibling (or sibling’s friend) touches or uses items in the boundary space. This also includes computers and video game consoles.

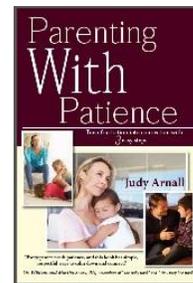
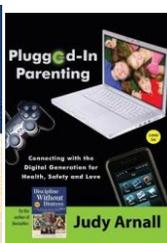
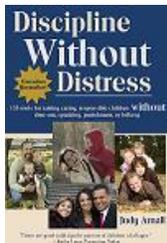
Does drawing a territorial line in the room or dividing the room in half so each child has a half of the room make sense? If kids are fighting over space, a line may help at first, to establish boundaries and may be removed later.

Bunkbeds are a great idea for saving space. They allow for the children to have more essential floor space to play. They can be used as a puppet theatre with sheets around the bottom bunk area. Also if the older child wants to read on top, the younger one can have dark by hanging dark sheets under the top mattress. If the opposite occurs (younger child wants to read), get a little reading light or a top cover from Ikea to keep the top area dark. If one child wants to watch a DVD, they can use the small players and headphones for noise. Children younger than six should not use the top bunk. Bunkbeds are not really great for when a child is sick and parents need to attend to them. The bunkbeds with a single on top and double below are ideal for sleepovers and attending to sick/scared children.

A common question is when should siblings move to a separate room. The answer is when they want to. Many teens naturally want more privacy at age 13 away from parents and siblings, but sometimes due to small space, they still have to share a room. That's okay. It will do them no harm unless boundaries are not respected. Many teens are okay sharing a room until they leave home, depending on the size of the room and space limitations.

Judy Arnall, BA, DTM, CCFE, currently teaches parenting at The University of Calgary, Continuing Education, and has taught for Chinook Learning, Families Matter, and Alberta Health Services for the past 13 years. Judy is the author of the International bestseller, ***Discipline Without Distress: 135 Tools for raising caring, responsible children without time-out, spanking, punishment or bribery*** and the newly released ***Parenting With Patience: Turn frustration into connection with 3 easy steps***. WWW.PROFESSIONALPARENTING.CA
Jarnall@shaw.ca 403-714-6766, Join our list for monthly notifications of free parenting webinars

Judy has written bestsellers:



Judy is authorized and certified to teach:

