Creating child-friendly spaces at home

Do your children have enough physical and psychological space for healthy development?

Children need time for solitude and the chance to create private spaces. When their days are crowded with activities they may not have the time or opportunity for quiet reflection or the chance to just ‘chill out.’

Children need time to ‘muck around’, which is ‘kidtalk’ for not doing anything structured or organised.

They need physical space free from others to be able to explore, play uninterrupted and withdraw into themselves.

Children’s bedrooms are great places for private space. They can play on their own or leave toys and puzzles out for a period time to revisit when they want. Some children find sanctuary in their bedrooms when life gets a little crowded or hard to handle.

Some children are adept at finding nooks and crannies to go to even in the most crowded living areas. Behind couches, underneath tables and under beds are just some of the places kids have been known to retreat to for a break.

You may need to give some public space over to your child in your home so they can create a mini-haven. If your home is always super-neat then you may have to adjust your standards for a while. Sometimes child-initiated spaces can be messy, particularly inside.

Spaces can be outside as well as inside. Cubby-houses, sheds, trees and bushes make great retreats for children.

Older children generally have less opportunity for mucking around as their lives become filled with homework, sport and other organised activities. Ironically, as children move into adolescence they need more downtime to help them relax and also process internally all that happens to them during the day.

Some children are high-octane drivers who are in constant motion and never sit still. They may spend some time alone but it probably won’t be for too long. It is all about getting the balance right for the individual child.

The ability to relax, reflect and draw on your own inner resources is an essential mental health habit. This is sometimes difficult for adults who are constantly challenged for free time, solitude and the mindset of just playing around. It generally comes naturally for children provided they have some unstructured time, the opportunity to play and explore and the physical space to have some solitude.

Do you feel…?

a) “Let me see if I have this right. You feel…”

b) “You never listen to a thing I say. Now…”

c) “I don’t know what to say. What would you like me to do?”

d) “Get over it for goodness sake!”

Which of the following statements are more likely to diffuse a difficult situation at home?

Answers:

a) This response shows listening and also focuses on how a child feels about a situation.

b) This response shows that the child misquotes you and will give a reasonable guide as to how situation related to the age of the child

c) This response shows listening and invites a child to offer a solution.

d) This response shows listening and also focuses on how a child feels about a situation.

Bright idea

An idea for a dad who comes home after children are in bed

Give each of your children an exercise book or diary so that you can record messages or put pictures in there for each other every day. When you come home go to their bedroom and collect their books. At some time write your own message to your children in their books. It maybe something about your day, how you feel or just picture or funny drawing. Put it back in their room so it will be the first thing they look at in the morning.

Wise & Witty Words

“Today we have somehow lost touch with the wisdom…that mothers can and do have a profound positive impact on the emotional lives of boys, an impact that lasts a lifetime.”

William Pollack

“Children seldom misquote you. In fact, they usually repeat word for word what you shouldn’t have said.”

Unknown from Cornerstone 2003