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room for 2



Telling secrets at bedtime, taking turns, respecting differences: The benefits of sharing a room with a sibling can last a lifetime.

DOUBLE THE FUN A shared room can be classically pretty (opposite page, the bedroom of Flora and Eliza Crichton-Stuart) or clean and modern (Cosmo Scharf and Rose Kramer's white bunks with storage underneath).



PHOTO LEFT: ANNE SCHLICHTER, PROOF STYLIST; KATE MCCANN FOR MARNE ROSE AGENCY, PHOTO RIGHT: ANNE SCHLICHTER, PROOF STYLIST; HELEN LANG, PINK DOT BLANKETS AVAILABLE AT PROPERTY, NYC, 917-237-0123; PINK FLORAL, EMBROIDERED PILLOW AVAILABLE AT ABC CARRIET AND HOME, NYC, 212-473-3000.

room for 2

When my husband and I began searching for a larger home—a third child and a big dog had turned our previous one from cozy to crowded—one of our goals was to have a bedroom for each of our three kids. Our two daughters had been sharing a room for nearly three years, and despite the fact that they got along well, our 10-year-old, Nicole, had been asking for her own room.

So last August we moved to a bigger house. And for the first three months, Nicole and Emily, 8, hardly spent a night apart. When they tried, one would often awaken during the night and hop into bed with the other. Nine months later, they have finally settled into their own rooms. But on a regular basis, one sister still meanders across the hall for a sleepover.

"When children are young, they gain a feeling of security from another's presence, and a sibling can be a real comfort at bedtime," says Patricia Dalton, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and family therapist in Washington, DC. Rather than feeling guilty or regretful if their children don't have their own rooms, parents should recognize the benefits of the situation. "Children who share a room learn a lot about give-and-take and tend to work things out on their own when given the chance," Dr. Dalton says.



JUST THE TWO OF US Cosmo, age 8, gets comfy with sister Rose, 6 (above); Flora and Eliza, 9 and 8, show off their room (below).



buildingabond

For Alison and Anthony Crichton-Stuart of New York City, putting daughters Flora, 9, and Eliza, 8, in a room together freed the sisters to build a close relationship away from Mom and Dad. "We find that sibling rivalry dissipates when the girls are alone together," says Alison. "At night they have sweet chats and help each other with reading. They can be friends and sisters without feeling jealous about who has Mommy's attention."

For many siblings, sharing a room is a chance to exercise skills that will be invaluable in years to come. "Children who share a room are learning how to live together, tune in to each other's feelings, compromise, problem-solve, and defend themselves," says Adele Faber, a parent educator in Roslyn Heights, NY, and co-author of *Siblings Without Rivalry*. "It's an experience that brings benefits they can use in future relationships."

At the Halper home in Pacific Palisades, CA, Matthew, 11, Adam, 8, and Daniel, 6, share space as a threesome (in a bunk bed and an extra twin) and don't know any other way. The brothers do their homework in the kitchen, read books at bedtime, and say good night at the same hour. Their mother, Priscilla, sees their closeness as a gift but admits that it can cause a great deal of commotion. "They scream really loud over something minor and then forget about it and have dessert," she says. ➤

learning to negotiate

Sharing a room breeds togetherness, but it also requires plenty of compromise—and parents can help by staying out of the fray as much as possible. “Siblings should be encouraged to come up with solutions to their problems,” says Faber. “If they get stuck, a parent can step in and offer some ideas. But it’s not just the solution that’s important; it’s the attitude that develops from working things out. The result is a willingness to be flexible and a sensitivity to each other’s feelings.”

Parents can ease the process of negotiation by making sure each child feels that some part of the room belongs only to him, whether it’s a bookcase, a keepsake shelf, or half the drawers of a dresser. Ruby and Skye Aresty of Mamaroneck, NY, share a bedside table, but each girl has her own drawer. Skye, 10, keeps a Harry Potter collection, and Ruby, 8, knows that her sister’s area is off limits. But according to their mom, Roseanne, learning to share space is what life is all about. “I’m an advocate for figuring out how to co-exist,” she says. “In their room, the girls learn to work together and create a special world.”



WORK & PLAY Cosmo and Rose share a built-in laminate desk (above); Flora and Eliza’s dollhouse fits under a window (below).



“We all have our own way of organizing and personalizing things,” adds designer Susan Salzman, founder of Little Folk Art in Los Angeles and co-author of *Rooms to Grow In*. “If each person has a space, no matter the size, where he can be himself and express who he is, that’s the key to enabling him to respect someone else’s space too.” (For expert advice on decorating a shared bedroom, see page 112.)

For sleepovers and private time, parents may need to help decide who goes where. When the Halper boys want time alone with a friend, they move to the family’s playroom or den. The Aresty sisters place a mattress between their beds when one of their friends spends the night. And on a recent sleepover at Eliza Crichton-Stuart’s, the agreement was for the buddies to have the bedroom while Flora went to sleep in her younger brother’s room and was moved to her own bed later.

Although most families put siblings of the same gender together, a brother and sister can make great roommates. For Cosmo Scharf, 8, and his sister, Rose Kramer, 6, of New York City, toys are not his or hers but theirs. “There are no male-female stereotypes when they play,” says their mother, Susan Kramer, who plans to give both kids rooms of their own when the family moves to a larger apartment. She reports with a laugh, “The kids suggested turning the additional bedroom into a playroom, which shows how much they like to be together.” ➤

Experts note that by the age of 8 or 9, when interests diverge and a child's body may begin to develop, separation by gender makes sense when possible. And although personality has a lot to do with the success of a shared room, kids closer in age generally fare better as a pair than, say, a toddler and a teen or a baby and a 10-year-old who's really into Legos.

In spite of the many challenges, siblings can gain lifelong benefits from rooming together—even if they don't see it that way when they're young. "You find out more about yourself when you share a room with another person," says Faber. Within my own family, sharing a room brought Nicole and Emily closer as sisters and friends. They were playmates by day and companions by night. Now, every evening when I tuck our 4-year-old son, Simon, into bed, he says, "I don't want to sleep in here all by myself." My girls don't realize how lucky they were.  www.child.com/community.

 Do your children share a room? What are the benefits and challenges? Tell us on the Development Concerns message board at www.child.com/community.

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PERSONAL TOUCHES Bright accents show off Rose's and Cosmo's favorite colors (above); stuffed tigers perch on Eliza and Flora's vintage trunk (below).



fairshare

To design your children's bedroom with an eye toward keeping all the occupants content, remember these three easy rules:

- 1. Include kids in the planning.** Let children make some decorative choices, such as bedding, toy storage containers, artwork, and colors. "Show them pictures from magazines or catalogs, giving several options that aren't too extreme and can grow with them," says Lyn Peterson, president of Motif Designs in New Rochelle, NY.
- 2. Eliminate wasted space.** Susan Kramer hung kitchen cabinets above her kids' desktop and tucked organizer drawers underneath (see previous page). Shelves can be mounted above beds to display artwork, stuffed animals, and mementos, or choose twin beds that include bookcase headboards, such as those from P.J. Kids. Today's flexible bunk beds can be configured with the top bunk against the wall and bottom bunk at a 90° angle, leaving room for a desk or seating underneath. (Look for examples from Stanley's Young America collection and Bassett Kids.) Wall-mounted lamps save space on bedside tables.
- 3. Carve out zones of privacy.** For kids who crave the feeling of a private room, place bookcases back to back between the beds or side by side with one facing each child's bed. (Place cork on the backs to make a bulletin board for each child.) Furnishings can be "complementary but not identical," says Susan Salzman of Little Folk Art, which helps siblings feel the room reflects their unique personalities.