

How to design a kid's dream bedroom that lasts from toddler to teen

Think wallpaper you can colour in, drawers instead of wardrobes, cosy textures and a hint of your own childhood



Caroline Madden

Given the ever-present lure of screen time, coupled with lingering post-pandemic stress being experienced by many children, it's more important than ever to carve out ways for kids to just be kids. One effective option is to turn children's bedrooms into screen-free sanctuaries, that reflect their personalities and provide a safe space to unwind while exploring their creativity and interests. Fortunately, creating a cosy cocoon for kids is achievable even if time, money and space is limited.

Interior designer Natasha Rocca Devine has a keen interest in mental health, and notes that a lot of children are stressed and anxious at the moment. Devine emphasises the importance of getting kids back in touch with their imagination and bringing out their creativity, and says their bedroom can be used to introduce "serenity" back into their lives. "We need children to have that more than ever."

A child's bedroom should draw them away from screens, so she advises against having any technology in the space, including TVs. Music, on the other hand, is extremely beneficial. Parents could consider creating a music zone so their child can chill out listening to their favourite albums, or having fun with a small karaoke kit (such as this one from Smyths for €69.99).

She recommends incorporating a creativity corner or "switch-off area" where the child can write, paint or read. "It doesn't have to be a huge area," she says. "It could be a little area that can be opened out to do art. So if they've had a stressful day at school, even if they're annoyed or tired, they can draw." If you're on a tight budget, simply buy a paint easel or a cheap Etch A Sketch, put up some Ikea bookshelves and go to a charity shop to load up on second-hand kids' books.

A drawing wall can also be created quickly and cheaply with chalkboard paint, which can be ordered from B&Q for €15/l, or self-adhesive chalkboard wallpaper available from Scribblewall for €54 (€62). For a discreet look, the drawing wall can even go inside a wardrobe. Or consider going the other direction entirely and give your budding artist a canvas on a grand scale by lining one of their bedroom walls with colour-in wallpaper that they can then paint themselves, such as Doodles wallpaper from etsy.com, starting at about €54 a roll.

It's also important to get kids moving, and a door-mounted mini-basketball hoop (such as this option from Elvery's, for €16) will encourage children to start shooting hoops in their spare time.

Nostalgia

Interiors consultant Ruth Noble advises keeping as much floor space free as possible as, regardless of their age, kids like to have room to play, roll around and wrestle. For this reason, Noble recommends that shelving for treasured belongings like soft toys, prizes and Lego should ideally be wall-mounted, as should desks or work-benches. Similarly, kids don't need large bedside tables; just a little surface beside their bed will suffice. Opting for Roman blinds instead of floor-length curtains will add to the feeling of having more floor space. She also suggests displaying musical instruments, such as guitars, by hanging them on the bedroom wall, but only if they are in regular use as otherwise they'll gather dust.

When designing a child's bedroom, Noble likes to incorporate cosy textures such as soft quilted materials, furry rugs and materials such as wicker, painted wood and felt. "Children of all ages appreciate texture for its comfort as well as its touch-and-feel aspect," she says. She tries to introduce elements from nature wherever possible, such as pictures of locations of natural beauty, in order to lend a relaxing feel to the area.

She also likes to include some "nostalgia" into children's bedrooms by bringing in something that once belonged to their parents or grandparents, or pieces that have a story behind them. "In one children's bedroom design, we incorporated an old school desk which had belonged to the mother of the child," she recalls. "In other cases we have incorporated framed pictures of the parents as children." Even framing a small family tree is enough to add a sense of family and belonging.

Meanwhile, Devine encourages parents to involve their children in the process of decorating their room, as it represents a great opportunity to teach them valuable life lessons such as budgeting. For example, if you're choosing wallpaper, explain how much money is set aside for it and allow them to pick something they like while staying within budget. "Involving them in the process is really exciting," she says. "Do it as a family project... do a spreadsheet."

Overall, decorating a child's bedroom can be done really cheaply by sourcing items from retailers like Jysk and Ikea – or Harvey Norman for pieces that are a little higher-end – as long as you're prepared to assemble the furniture yourself. Devine says the total cost of the project could stretch to a few thousand euro, but could easily be completed for a thousand.

And finally, no Zen space would be complete without one key element: storage. A



Top tips for twin toddlers...

Interior designer Wioleta Kelly, who has three-year-old twins, says that if you're lucky enough to have twins, there are a few key things to keep in mind when decorating their bedroom:

■ **Start with a theme.** "If you want the room to grow with children, choose a generic theme over cartoon characters," Wioleta says. "Flowers, dots, maps, and geometrical patterns will last longer than, let's say, Peppa Pig images, saving you both time and money."

■ **Use calm, muted colours.** "The last thing you want is your toddlers getting a burst of energy going to bed because the bedroom is painted in vibrant colours." Wioleta's top paint picks include Mucky Swan by Colourtrend (this is the colour she currently has in her twins' bedroom),

top tip from Noble is that drawers, shelving and chests are far more suitable for children's clothes storage than hanging space.

So when designing fitted furniture for children's bedrooms, she usually incorporates drawers to the lower section of a wardrobe and just a short hanging space above. Sometimes she adds open shelving to the gable end of a wardrobe to display books

Garden Grey by Dulux and Sulking Room Pink by Farrow and Ball.

■ **Include matching furniture.** "If you can find furniture that's designed for twins, it will help make the room look pulled together."

■ **Use wall decals (i.e. vinyl wall stickers).** "Wall decals are a great way to add personality to a room without making any permanent changes."

■ **Add a rug for texture and warmth** and to keep toddlers from slipping and sliding on hardwood or laminate floors. Kelly recommends synthetic rugs as they're easy to keep clean and can be bleached, which the parents of twin toddlers will no doubt appreciate.

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■ Clockwise from top: a child's bedroom should be screen free (Lifetime Beach House); good storage helps a child to play (Vox Tuli Bookcase & Toy Storage, £175); a good bedroom has somewhere to dream (Stargazer chaise longue, DFS Cath Kidston (€1,099); the Lifetime Princess 4 in 1 Combination Bed is suitable for children from age two all the way to 11 and up (€1,729); this bedroom designed by Ruth Noble Interiors has good storage for a growing child; give your budding artist a canvas on a grand scale by lining one of their bedroom walls with colour-in wallpaper that they can then paint themselves, such as Doodles wallpaper from etsy.com (starting at about €54 a roll); Wioleta Kelly designed this sleeping space for her toddler twins, with added safety features; a bedroom from Ruth Noble Interiors which has a nostalgic touch in the form of a school desk



The don'ts of decorating children's bedrooms

■ Interior consultant Ruth Noble advises against an overly-themed bedroom. "As children grow, their interests can change from one stage to the next," she explains. "Window dressings, fabrics and wall murals can be expensive so do not overly theme the room so that it cannot be changed over time." Instead, incorporate less expensive themed accessories such as cushions, throws and wall hangings that can be swapped out over time.

■ **Avoid too much stimulation** within the room. "The space should incorporate educational and adventurous aspects, enough to engage the child's imagination but not to overstimulate them. It is a bedroom after all," Noble says.

■ **Don't over-clutter the room** as it should be a sanctuary. "If you have the space, try to keep bigger toys or activities in a play-room or kitchen space within the house."

