

STRUCTURED SPACES

For Children and Home Learning

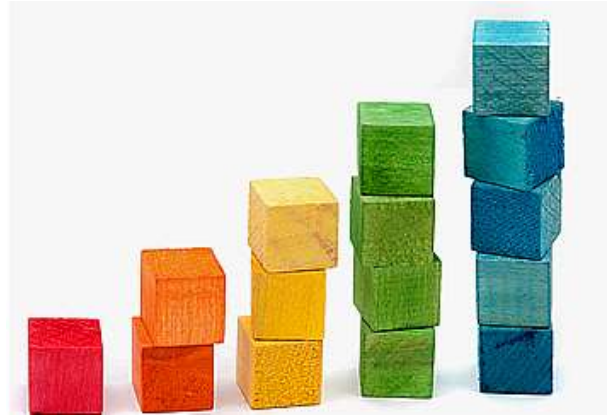
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Here are some simple steps / principles to help you organize and structure your home.

Like Goes with Like

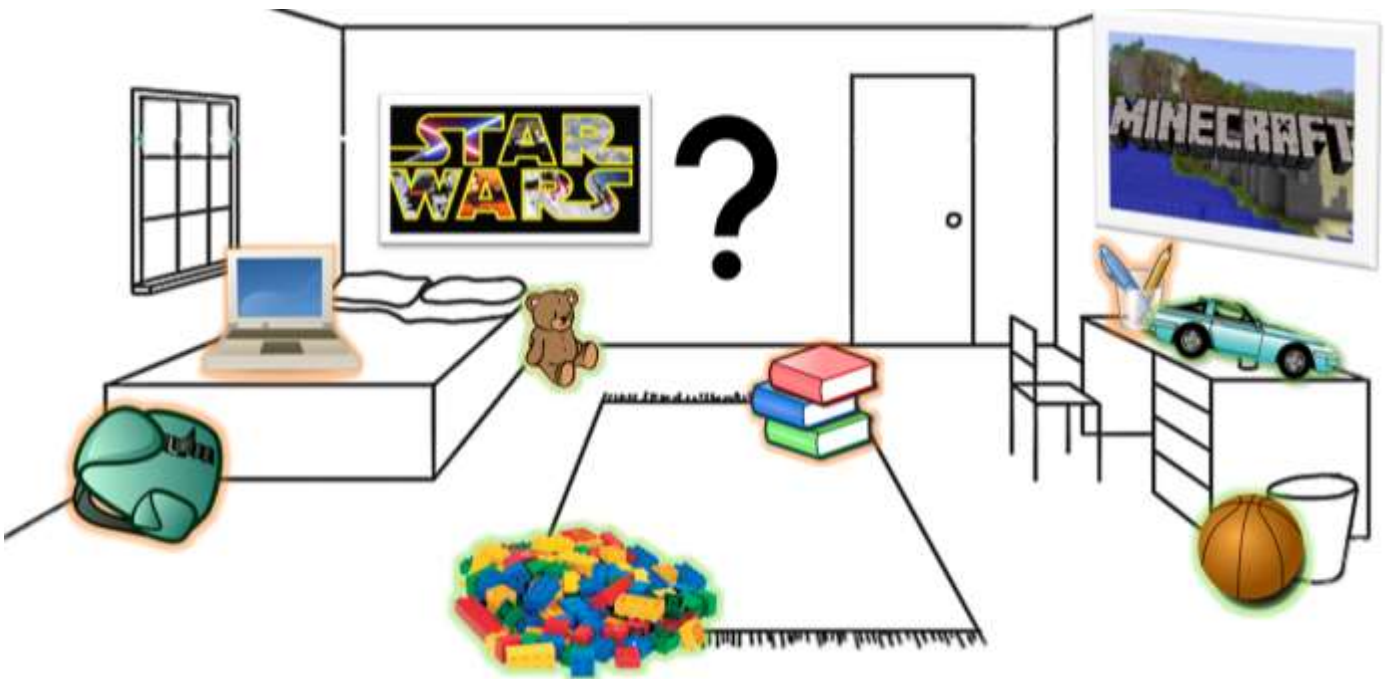


When objects in a space are mixed together it makes it feel cluttered and confusing



Putting like items together starts to bring order and structure to a space

Consider this room:

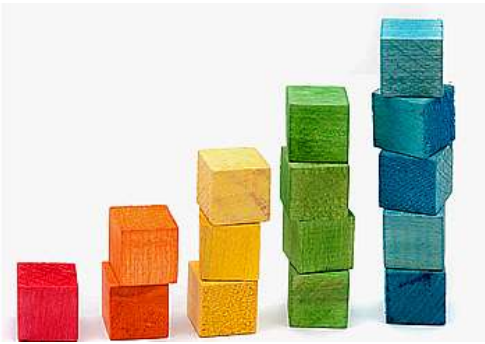


Where should this child work?

This room is cluttered and confusing for the child, because everything is mixed together.

Where should this child play?

Activity Centers



Creating activity centers is an effective strategy for creating structure in a space and helping children understand what they should be doing in that space

“Like” items are put into one spot according to a shared activity they are all used for to create each center.

In a correct “activity center” a child can both:

1. Find all the **supplies** they need

2. and **do** that activity



You will want to create an activity centre for each set of activities your child does on a regular basis. This will include a centre for:



Schoolwork



Play



Creating



Exercise



Rest / Comfort

The following steps will help you create a centre for each of these activities

Step 1 – Identify What Needs to Be There

Within each center should be all the supplies and furniture needed to do the assigned activity. This way, a child can look and know, “this is where I _____” and be able to start doing it. List / draw what you need for each center:



School Work:

- Table
- Folders
- Headphones
- Pencils
- Reading Books



Play Time:



Crafts / Messy Play / Creating:



Exercise / Burning Energy:



Rest / Comfort

Step 2 – Plan it Out

Centers should be physically separate from each other and self-contained. In it, a child should have everything they need to do the designated activity, so they don't need to leave to get other items and get distracted along the way.

Your child's bedroom is a good place to set up quieter centers, and other spaces in the house for more disruptive ones. As you plan where you want your centers it can help to:



Use Sticky Notes:

Write what you need for each area on its own sticky notes

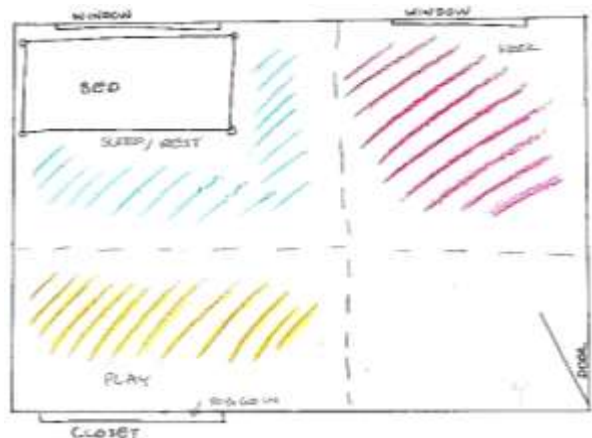
Take them around the house with you. See which spot you think all those things could fit

Put the sticky note in that spot

Draw it out:

Draw a map of your child's room. You can include some of the basic furniture.

This can help you visualize which activities make sense in which part of the room based on how much space there is and how close it will be to permanent fixtures (door, closet, windows etc.)



how



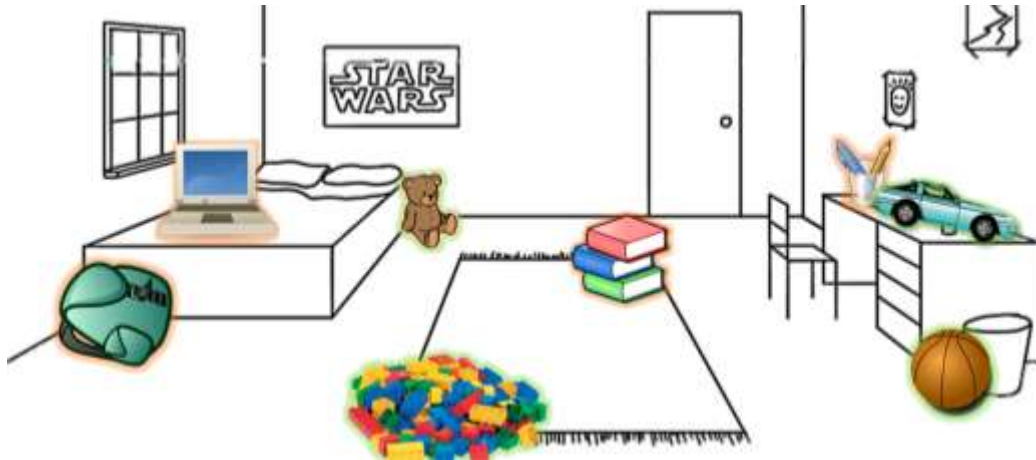
Move some things around:

Using the furniture pieces, you already have, try moving a few things around to see where they do / don't fit

This will give you a good sense of how the basic structure of the space will work and "feel." It may also help you identify any other furniture you need.

Step 3 – Physically Block Off Each Centre

Centres need to be visually / physically blocked off from each other, otherwise a child will soon be distracted and leave the room looking like this:



Many different objects, including furniture can serve as physical barriers:

Curtains/ Drapery



Room Dividers



Shelving / Storage



Loft beds / bunk beds are another great “barrier” option for smaller rooms

The space under the bed can be made into a cozy area for reading, quiet play or calming activities. Or you can choose to use it to create an enclosed office / work space

Use your map of the bedroom, and draw in

where you would like to put your barriers:



You may need to pick up additional furniture to have a barrier for each activity centre. Add any of these items to your list from Step 1. These pieces don't need to be fancy especially if they are being used for rough play. Some great places to look for child friendly furniture:



Free or buy / sell groups



Thrift Stores



Garage Sales

Step 4 – Set Up Your Centers

Now that you have identified what you need for each activity center, and planned some initial set up, is time to assemble and organize your centers.

School work space



Exercise Area



Some important things to consider in your set up:

- Keep the space as visually simple as possible by limiting decorations and keeping out unrelated objects which clutter up the space.
- Furniture should have enough space around it for your child to move freely and access what they need without squishing, squeezing or bending over anything
- Supplies should be stored where they can be seen and accessed by the child.
- Things the child needs should be at a level where they can see and reach them

These final two points are discussed in greater detail below:

Use Clear and Logical Storage

After tirelessly organizing everything, you will definitely want to keep it that way! It is important to store objects in ways where it is *clear* to the child where those objects are (i.e. visible) and *logical* where they should be put back. Here are some suggestions:



See-through containers allow children to see all objects vs trying to remember where things are. Both plastic and wire mesh containers can be easily found. Written or picture labels can also be put on the outside as another cue

Open shelves are easily accessible and show everything inside. They work well for larger items like books, big toys and ongoing crafts / projects.



Hanging shoe organizers are a great option to increase vertical space and can be hung behind a door or on a wall. Again the child can see all the items they need for that activity and it is clear where they go back.

Organizing trays can be put in drawers. When the child opens it, they can see everything they need for that activity ie school, crafts, building lego etc.. It is easy to figure out where things go back



Think of Levels



When organizing a space for a child it is think of how the world looks in their eyes...

...which are much lower than yours.

If you want your child to be able to do something on their own, they need to be able to see it and to reach it. Conversely, if you want them to ask your help for something you can place it up higher. Here's an example of how that looks in an office space:



Supplies I don't want the children using are high up, and hard to see. They physically can't access them without me

Children's personal journals, which is private, low enough so they can reach their own, but out of other children's view so they ignore it

Calming tools are at children's eye and arm level. They are all visible, on the shelf or in a clear bin with a lable on it.

Snacks are also at their eye and arm level. The bin is clear, and open without a lid which says "help yourself."

Everything I want the children to use independantly is visible and reachable. Everything I want to keep private, or them to ask me for is up higher and hard to reach. This principle applies both to how you organize your childs room, as well as other parts of the home.

Why do Structured Spaces Help?



Helps Balance Emotions: The room around me is calm and structured. This external cue shows me what calm is, so I can start calming myself.



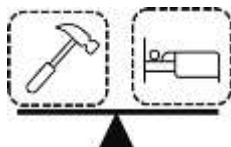
Creates Stability /Security: The room makes sense. I know where everything is since it's organized logically. I can see the things I need and easily get them



Builds Self-Regulating Skills: I see around me tools / objects that help me feel calm when I use them. They are easy to reach, so I can grab them when I need. The more I use them, the more I become used to using those tools.



Helps with Transitions: Each spot is meant for a certain activity. When I move from one spot to the other, I intuitively start getting ready for the activities that happen in the new spot.



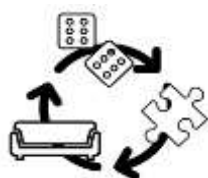
Helps Balance Work and Rest: I associate a spot with its activity, when I am in the "work" spot I am working, and in the "rest" spot I am resting. I can separate "work" time and "rest" time so my life feels more balanced



Increases Children's Independence: physical or sensory needs can be met as needed. When I have a physical / sensory need (like too much energy) I can see and use the objects that help me with it (like a bike) and use it



Contains Disruptive Activities: messy activities (like art) only happen in one spot. A visual routine can be created, put up on the wall and taught to a child so they can start, do and clean up a project independently.



Makes the Room Multi-Purpose: Multiple people can use one space at a time for different reasons without it feeling crowded. Different tasks can be done in one space without it feeling confusing.

Want to Learn More?

Check out our [Resource](#) page to try some of our other helpful tools



Got questions? Let us know www.heartandhomeconsulting.com/contact/