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Bigger homes may stifle family time Midstate follows pattern of kids with own rooms



Kaitlyn Teeter, 12, relaxes in her own bedroom in Lebanon. DIPTI VAIDYA / THE TENNESSEAN

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Home sizes are up, family sizes down, and combined they may be shifting the family relationship.

More and more children have their own rooms, allowing them to express their own interests and

creativity but also, some experts fear, preventing them from learning to share and damaging the sibling bond.

Those rooms are often more like mini-apartments, with all the comforts of, well, home. TVs, computers and DVD players are increasingly common; a 2005 study showed that 68 percent of kids ages 8-18 have a TV in their bedroom. And 43 percent of children ages 4-6 have their own TV.

Yitzchak Goldman, a Seattle rabbi and advocate of limiting consumerism, sees separate bedrooms as another indication of society's culture of isolation and self-expression and potentially damaging to the sibling relationship long term.

"This type of bonding is what you remember later in life, something you'll always treasure," Goldman said, fretting that family relationships in general are becoming more superficial.

Parker Teeter, 15, sees both sides. He shared a bedroom with brother Michael and recalled it as giving him a sense of security, but he wouldn't give up his private room now.

"I like the privacy. You can get away from distractions, like if your parents get mad or your brother or sister gets on your nerves."

Households get smaller

If home-building trends are any indication, more children will have the privacy that Teeter loves.

Nationally, one in five houses has four bedrooms or more, up from 15 percent in 1990, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. In Tennessee, 17 percent of houses are that large.

Also, household sizes are getting smaller. In 1970, it was 3.1 people; now, it's 2.6.

If you live in Williamson County, you're more likely to have enough bedrooms for the

KEEPING THE PEACE

Siblings who share a room don't have to fight over privacy, space or style if they follow these tips:

- Use headphones if you're watching TV, listening to music or playing a video game while your sibling is doing something else.
- Try to keep a consistent decorating theme in the room but with your own personal touches. Agree on one decorating color, but pick different shades for your side of the room and your accessories.
- Ask before using something that doesn't belong to you.
- Return anything you borrow promptly and in good condition.
- Try to give each other a little privacy.
- Be tidy, or at least as tidy as your sibling.
- Respect each other's differences.
- If all else fails, consider room dividers.

SOURCES: SafeKids newsletter, www.decorating-kids-rooms.net, HGTV host Pat Simpson

whole brood. In that affluent county of McMansions, 39 percent of homes have four bedrooms or more.

Jorge Borge, a Nashville clinical psychologist who works with children and families, doesn't necessarily think it's wrong for children to have their own bedrooms, as long as parents schedule time together to bond and family members don't isolate themselves.

"Every family member has a TV, a DVD, a stereo, sometimes their own computer in their room," he said. "That leads to a lot less shared time."

At the four-bedroom Teeter home in Lebanon, each of the two teen boys and the youngest child, Kaitlyn, 12, has his or her own room. Father Eric Teeter doesn't worry about his kids being isolated.

"They don't shut themselves in their room," he said. "Their rooms are where they keep their clothes and stuff."

The family upgraded to the four-bedroom home in Wilson County 10 years ago. Before that, the then-preschool-aged boys shared a room in a three-bedroom home.

"There was a lot of bickering and squawking, a lot of 'mine, not yours,' " their father said. A bigger house "gave us more room and kept the boys from killing each other."

Kaitlyn said she wouldn't mind sharing a room if she had a sister. "But we'd probably end up fighting a lot."

Personalities can clash

Perhaps some of the troubles that siblings who share a room encounter has to do with differences of personalities. That's where having your own room can be a benefit. Debbie Mandel, a New York author of *Turn on Your Inner Light*, advocates giving kids their own bedrooms because they're "a perfect mode of self-expression."

"Children need to be distinguished and individual, especially when they're close in age."

A private room gives children a quiet place to retreat to and a space to express themselves through personalized decorations, she said. Having their own rooms teaches young ones how to be responsible for managing a place, like keeping it clean, she said.

Putting children together in a room doesn't always mean they will form close bonds, she said. "They could be like Cain and Abel," she said, referring to the biblical story of brothers in which one kills the other.

Sharing can help bonding

Jane Crenshaw has five children, and in her Belle Meade home, the six bedrooms include individual rooms for three children, plus a master bedroom and guest room. That leaves the 10-year-old girls, who with a brother are triplets, as the only ones sharing a room. They would get their own room if the home was any bigger, said this stay-at-home mom and school volunteer. She sees both sides of kids bunking together.

"They do bond more, but just lately they were complaining they were tired of always being put together," Crenshaw, 46, said. She also wonders if her messy 14-year-old would be neater had she roomed with her organized older sister.

The Sullivans, who have a four-bedroom home in Williamson County, prefer their children to bond in a way they believe is fostered by shared rooms. They have a boy, 6,

girls ages 5 and 3, and 22-month-old twins, a boy and girl.

As soon as the twins are old enough to be out of baby beds, the boys will share a room and the girls will share another. The spare room will be used as a guest room and playroom, said mom Rose Anne Sullivan.

"It promotes sharing," she said. "They learn to negotiate and get along. A lot of times I can overhear them settling issues on their own about when to wake up and play."

These are tools, she said, her kids will find useful when sharing college dorm rooms with strangers.

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