

# Sibling Bedroom Boundaries



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Even before Marna Louis' second child was born, she and her husband knew the baby would be sharing a room with their older daughter, regardless of if it were a boy or a girl. And, Kari Lee desperately needed a music room to give private lessons in, so she moved her son into a room with his two sisters.

Years ago, sharing a bedroom was common. Then it went out of fashion, as families got smaller and houses grew into mini mansions. Today, however, kids are starting to share rooms again — whether because of economic down-sizing or just as families are choosing to live smaller and smarter.

## The Benefits

Many parents have fond memories of sharing a room with a sibling, when they were growing up. Or, at the very least, they recognize the value of the lessons they learned while sharing.

"Sharing a room teaches kids how to share and respect private space. Those are related issues, but different," says Russell Hyken, an educational diagnostician, psychotherapist, and the creator of [www.ed-psy.com](http://www.ed-psy.com). "You need those skills in life. They're good to learn at an early age with natural consequences."

Many parents find that when brothers and sisters share a room, the squabbling is much less than between the same-sex siblings. "There usually is more competitiveness and rivalry with same-sex siblings," says James J. Crist, author of "Siblings, You're Stuck with Each Other, So Stick Together!" He adds, "Siblings of the opposite sex just don't breed that same conflict. It's the same way girls in the classroom can moderate boys."

Frequently, boys and girls have different interests, so there isn't the same competition for toys, clothes and, frequently, friends. It actually can be a happier, healthier experience than same gender sharing.

## The Logistics

Louis' daughter and son have been sharing a room since birth. They're now 8 and 10. "For us, the decision was a space issue, so early on we felt it was easy for them to do. It's worked out really well and been a great experience for them." She adds, "It's a nice time for them to share together, and it

definitely has brought them closer."

In fact, parents may find that, because kids spend so little time in their rooms, it isn't much of an issue. Rory Leahy has boy-girl twins who shared a room until the fourth grade. "It wasn't like they made it a social space. They get along really well. and it was a nice experience for them."

First lady Michelle Obama shared a room with her brother, Craig Robinson, while growing up. Today, both of them speak openly about how this set the foundation for an extremely close relationship over the years.

Hyken advises parents to sit down and talk about boundaries. "When friends come over, where does the other sibling go, and do they play with the same friends? Are any toys or areas off limits? Are they treating other siblings appropriately? These are conversations all parents should have if their kids share a room."

### **The Teen Years**

Eventually, some special accommodations need to be made, particularly as children approach puberty. This doesn't mean they need to be split up, but they just need to be respectful of privacy issues. For Louis' family, this meant rotating the morning and evening routines.

"Usually, we'll have one of them get dressed and ready in the bedroom, while the other is brushing teeth in the bathroom. That kind of time management really eases some of the tension," says Louis.

Crist agrees. "The one issue that gets problematic as they get older is the sense of modesty," he says. Often a simple adjustment is all that's needed. "Once they are aware of the differences, they just shouldn't undress in front of each other," he adds. "Use the bedroom for sleep and play. If parents are concerned, have a rule of leaving the door open."

It's always important to talk to kids directly and see how they feel. If parents set ground rules and discuss privacy and boundary issues in advance, they're much less likely to see conflict.

### **The Long-Term Value**

Brothers and sisters who share a room receive a lifelong lesson in how the opposite sex thinks and acts. They learn how boys and girls are different, and how they are the same. And, they're not nearly as prone to stealing each other's things — whether toys, clothes or electronics.

In addition, siblings who share a room are more likely to be protective of each other. They also are more likely to have a healthier attitude toward the opposite sex.

Besides, all that talking and giggling at bedtime — as annoying as it can be at the time — will be

remembered well into adulthood.

*Laura Amann is a freelance writer and the mother of three girls and one boy. Her son and daughter choose to share a room.*