

# Family Life

## Kid-Friendly Kitchens

### **Most parents want a kitchen where children can help bake and cook.**

No mom ever poured pancake batter in the shape of a snowman for herself. Kitchens are meant to be kid-filled. Whether you're a grandparent, rearing a gaggle of little ones, or think you might want to one day, it's important to consider the kid-factor. After all, you want to make sure they can reach the counter to bake those chocolate chip cookies—and that they won't burn their hand when they try to grab a piping hot one from a just-out-of-the-oven sheet. Here are our tips for safe and accessible kitchens for kids:



### **Kid Space**

You may have a top-of-the-line playroom, but kids, especially little ones, want to be where their parents are. That's why it's often a good idea to include a "kid's cabinet" in your design. An easy-to-reach set of base cabinets can make it a snap for kids to access (and, hopefully, clean-up) their crayons and paper.

Adding a cubby area is also a wise choice for both parties: Mom and Dad can quickly toss forgotten toys and half-read books into each child's cubby for safekeeping. Neatly stored toys are then ready and waiting for the next time that boredom strikes.

### **Countertops and Flooring**

But where should your little Picasso sit after diving into the arts and crafts cabinet? Betty Nairn of Cabinet-S-Top of Medina, Ohio, cautions parents to "be careful not to incorporate high bar areas into your design." Kids perched on towering stools just spells trouble. Avoid tumbles by incorporating a table-height seating area: One smart pairing is a higher island that features a raised countertop for the adults to work on, with a lowered second tier that's kid height but still close to the action. But be careful not to get the little ones too close to it all—it's best not to install a cooktop on an island if you have young children, as they can grab for a pan or be splattered by hot oil if seated nearby.

In addition to the height of your countertop, think about the surface itself. Nairn recommends choosing a non-porous surface like quartz surfacing that won't stain easily or show excessive wear and tear. You'll also want to trade sharp corners for rounded edges. Look below the feet, too. Flooring should be user-friendly in terms of cleanability and slip-resistance. Something with a pattern tends to hide dirt more effectively, and be sure to inquire about durability...your floor may double as a tricycle track on occasion.

### **A Kid-Safe Cooking Space**

It's an all-too-familiar medley: "I'm hungry" meets "what's for dinner?" meets the endless open and close of the refrigerator door. Give kids a bit of autonomy and accessibility with a designated area for them to prepare meals or snacks. A breakfast area, for example, could allow for access to cereal, plastic bowls and spoons. Rather than grapple with milk set on a high shelf, a refrigerator drawer installed in an island provides easy access. When it comes to the main fridge, however, be sure to select a model with an

ice and water dispenser on the door.

The microwave is a safe and simple way to get your child excited about simple meal and snack preparation, from making popcorn to heating up oatmeal in the morning. It allows them to sidestep the need to use the oven ...so don't do something as unsafe as installing a microwave over a range. Sharp recently introduced a microwave drawer that can be installed into an island. A user-friendly interior control panel makes it simple for the kids to heat up mac 'n cheese—and eliminates bending and reaching for mom and dad as well.

### **Basic Safety Tips**

Nairn advises parents (and cooks in general) to keep a fire extinguisher in kitchen; locate it away from stove in a place that's easy to access. However, a number of items, like cleaning products and knives, should be kept far from curious hands. A number of manufacturers offer safety locks that aren't visible from the outside of the cabinet, meaning you don't need to ruin your design with unsightly plastic claws to ensure your children's safety.

For the times when you're ready for them to take part in supervised cooking—like helping stir a warm pot of pasta sauce, for instance, you'll want to be sure to keep a stepstool (with slip-resistant legs, preferably) on hand. It allows you and your junior cook to worry about licking the bowl—not how to precariously reach to counter.

### **The Little Things**

Because the kitchen is the heart of the home, don't forget little touches that will make the home itself operate more smoothly—and more whimsically. A corkboard or chalkboard panel lets your fridge pull double duty as the family's message center.

Add a punch of color—after all, the kitchen is a place of memories. Don't make them beige ones. Bright lime green walls can spruce things up, as can your children's drawings: Incorporate an area to hang recent masterpieces.

And, while opting for a specific faucet doesn't have any specific safety value, Nairn recommends getting a model with a pullout spray that kids can give a squirt on every now and then.

Because it's good to be safe and silly.