

**Tips for Parents** by Susie Kohl

## *A Cozy Space to Call One's Own*

**W**E CAN TEACH CHILDREN ABOUT PRIVACY and personal space in helpful, concrete ways. For children who have to spend every day in the company of other children, having a defined “alone” area at home can feel vitally important. Recently one of our Meher Schools families diminished family stress dramatically by rearranging a shared bedroom so that each boy would have his own domain, an area that his roommate would have to ask permission to enter. Some families do this by setting up the rule that you have ask permission to sit on someone else's bed.

Just like countries, when clear boundaries are established, children feel the need to fight less, and there are lots of ways to set up external supports for privacy. Parents can divide a bedroom shared by children with shelves or even tape going down the center of the room. Small, cozy areas that only fit one child allow for “alone time” in the living room. Space can be designated for each child to store cherished objects or projects that are still in process. Children love to create signs saying “Don't touch this!”

Adults also need to teach children about the concept of personal space, the idea that each of has an invisible bubble around us that we can keep others from invading, especially those we don't know. Recently the organization KidPower made presentations in all the elementary classrooms, offering many creative suggestions for setting boundaries.

Understanding these concepts helps children learn appropriate social behavior, like not climbing in a stranger's lap. We can ask children when it's appropriate to be in someone's personal space, like lining up for class or sitting next to someone on the bus. The way we honor others' feelings in those situations is by not leaning on them or touching them.

How great when children can learn to be physically close but respectful.

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