

PLAYFUL PLACES DESIGNING FOR **KIDS**

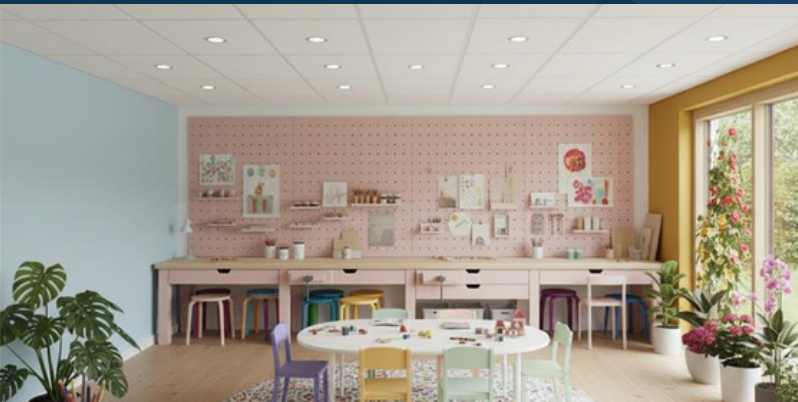


DESIGN & CHILDHOOD BEHAVIOR

Children's well-being, learning, and development are significantly shaped by the physical spaces where they spend their time. We have reviewed four key sources that examine architecture and design specifically aimed at **creating environments suitable for children**. Below, we identify the main priorities and practical guidelines that professionals like architects, planners, and educators should keep in mind when designing for young users.

The analysis places particular importance on using **supportive color schemes, creating adaptable layouts, integrating natural elements**, and ensuring that **safety and autonomy** for children are central in the planning of these spaces.

The design of spaces for children plays a crucial role in shaping their development, not just by providing shelter but by actively influencing their **behavior, physical and mental health, learning processes, and emotional well-being**. In recent years, researchers have highlighted that architectural approaches for kids' environments need to go beyond basic visual appeal; instead, they should embrace **holistic, salutogenic, and personalized strategies**. Drawing from current studies, we bring together ideas about **spatial and sensory design**, such as how **color choices, nature-inspired arrangements, and flexible classroom** organization can each affect young users in meaningful ways.





HOLISTIC DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Modern architectural practice increasingly integrates aesthetics with health promotion through what is called **salutogenic design**. This approach focuses on creating environments that support not just the physical health of children, but also their **psychological and social well-being**. When designing spaces for children, one needs to consider factors that foster children's feelings of **safety, belonging, independence, and sensory engagement**.



Some core attributes of **holistic design** include:

Comprehensibility: The environment should be easy for children to understand and navigate, which helps build their confidence and sense of security.

Manageability: Children should have some degree of control over their surroundings; this means flexible spaces, ergonomic furniture, and designs that accommodate diverse needs.

Meaningfulness: The space should encourage a sense of ownership and self-worth in children, which can be supported by opportunities for personalization and adaptable layouts that respond to their evolving needs.



SALUTOGENIC & BIOPHILIC APPROACHES

Studies have shown that human brain health is closely connected to spending time in **complex natural environments** and places rich with **sensory stimuli**. **Biophilic architecture** focuses on blending natural elements with man-made structures in ways that preserve both **ecological balance** and **emotional well-being**.

Some **key principles** include:

Green spaces: Easy access to outdoor learning areas, gardens, and courtyards that incorporate nature helps reduce stress and supports better cognitive development.

Natural light and airflow: Designing spaces to maximize sunlight and fresh air improves alertness and comfort.

Sensory variety: Incorporating different textures, patterns, decorations, and natural materials provides important neural stimulation and encourages positive feelings.

Sustainable design: Using native plants and environmentally friendly building methods benefits both children and the larger ecosystem.





SPATIAL ORGANIZATION AND PLAY

Flexible, Inclusive, and Play-Based Layouts

Children learn most effectively in spaces that encourage **active movement, exploration, and creativity**. Some **best practices** for spatial design include:

Spacious open areas: Providing more room than the minimum standards to allow children to engage in a variety of activities simultaneously.

Smooth indoor-outdoor transitions: Making sure children can move easily between classrooms and outdoor play areas or covered spaces to support healthy habits all year round.

Minimizing fixed furniture: Using mobile shelves and adaptable furniture encourages flexible room layouts that can change according to different teaching approaches or group sizes.



Child-friendly scale: Designing facilities like toilets, storage, and resting areas at child height encourages independence and comfort.

Inclusivity: Ensuring spaces accommodate all children, including those with special needs, through universal design and involving users in planning.

Safety and autonomy: Designing environments where supervision is clear but not intrusive, with manageable group sizes and easy navigation, helps children feel secure yet independent.

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**SKAP
ARCHITECTS**



www.skaparchitects.com
info@skaparchitects.com
416.878.6559