

This age is often referred to as middle childhood, tween or pre-teen years. It's the time between childhood and young adulthood and is one of rapid change — physical, emotional and social. Children this age have varying degrees of self-confidences, emotional maturity and interests, and it is often challenging for them to know how they “fit in” and find their place in the world.

This is also a time of self-guided discovery, independence, added responsibility and new experiences. In addition, technology (e.g., the Internet, mobile phones, social media, etc.) can significantly influence how pre-teens communicate with their peers and how they learn about the world. Successful library service to pre-teens means encouraging exploration, experiential learning and personal growth.

Create Lifetime Users Through Dynamic, Age-Appropriate Services

Space

Excellent library service means understanding this age groups' needs and interests and appropriately planning services and spaces that attract kids while keeping them engaged and coming back for more. Integrating a separate area for this age group within the children's library acknowledges they are not “babies” and are seen differently than preschoolers and young schooled-aged children. Many are already thinking of themselves as teens and long for all the amenities of a great teen area. *Note that many of the items listed here are things that can be shared spaces with other age groups, especially young school-aged children, when space is thoughtfully planned.*

- A popular collection area featuring high-interest materials such as new fiction and nonfiction, graphic novels, manga, comics, audiovisual materials, magazines, etc. *Note: This area is typically a shared space located near the entrance of the children's library that is appropriately designed for all ages and caregivers.*
- A quiet area for studying and recreational reading. In larger public facilities and schools, this often comes in the shape of small group meeting rooms or semi-private meeting areas created with dividers.
- Social space for chatting, hanging out, etc.
- Interactive areas for active gaming, problem-solving activities, art and literature sharing, etc. Often times the social space and interactive space flow together.
- Collaboration space for group work, teaching/tutoring opportunities, small group programming and instruction.
- On-the-floor programming and creation space for ongoing passive programming. Again, this is a type of “space” that flows together with social and interactive space.
- A collaborative computing area where two people can work together at one computer.



South Ridge School, Culver MN.
This library serves K–12 students. Careful space planning designed areas to address the different age groups.



Designing your floor plan and selecting furnishings creates a space that attracts pre-teens and keeps them coming back for more.

ZONING IN ON Children’s Spaces: Pre-Teen Space Planning

Decor

Age-appropriate decor will set the tone for this age group and show them that you don’t think of them as toddlers. Finding a general decor for the room that is welcoming, cohesive and can transition from babies to pre-teens is key to any successful children’s library space and goes a long way in making pre-teens feel welcome. *Note: Many of these concepts are also found in the Youth Checklist (ages 5–8).*

- Choose a general color scheme that is attractive and inviting to this age group.
- Use carpet tiles and/or area rugs to help define the space and add color and interest.
- Add interest and color through posters, gallery space for displaying their artwork, etc.
- Make signage attractive and easy to follow. Good signage will enhance the look of the space as well as help build independence and confidence. Organize and label materials in a way that promotes kids making appropriate selections and encourages them to explore.



Engaging spaces bring kids in and back again.



Waupun Public Library, Waupun, WI



Furnishings & Fixtures

Attractive and comfortable furnishings are a big deal to this age group. Not only do these items define the use of the space, but they are also there for practical purposes — supporting this group’s developmental needs. Furnishings that help foster independence and collaboration, education and recreation are all essential.

- Incorporate comfortable seating in all areas.
- Include ergonomic seating and tables for computing and technology areas.
- Include adult-sized tables and chairs in all areas.
- Include chairs with 14” H seats paired with 22”–25” H tabletops.
- Keep shelving at a maximum height of 66”, especially for interior shelving. If necessary, perimeter shelving on the walls can go up to 72” H, but 66” H is preferred.
- Incorporate face-out displays in combination with spine-out shelving in all collections to enhance visibility and accessibility of all collections, not just the ones in the Popular Collection.
- Purchase items on casters (tables, shelving, chairs, etc.), keeping things as portable as possible to allow the space to grow and adapt as needed. No matter what size space you have or what type of environment you’re in, flexibility in furnishings and shelving is a must.



Balance “formal” spaces for collaboration and learning with casual spaces for socializing and developing friendships.



ZONING IN ON Children’s Spaces: Pre-Teen Space Planning

Technology & Interactivity

Incorporating age-appropriate and appealing technologies and interactive resources are important in attracting this age group, as well as helping them develop important skills sets.

- ❑ Create a collaborative computing area. The computing model has moved away from “one person per computer” to the “collaborative computing” model. This new model enables children to work independently, with a friend or with an adult and is fundamental as project work in school increases for this age group. When planning this type of space, it is important to allow adequate workspace and seating. It is also one of those areas that can be shared with the Young School Aged group.
- ❑ Incorporate technologies beyond traditional computers. Such things may include iPads, listening devices such as iPods, interactive white boards, online resources, software, and access to digital creativity resources including, but not limited to, audio and video production tools, as the library is the place to pull it all together!
- ❑ Feature interactives beyond technology that allow for increased socialization, problem solving, collaboration, etc. Items may include traditional whiteboards and other types of interactive walls, board games, magnetic poetry and ongoing passive programming that changes out from day-to-day or week-to-week.



Denver Public Library – Green Valley Ranch Branch, Denver, CO
Computing spaces support collaboration.

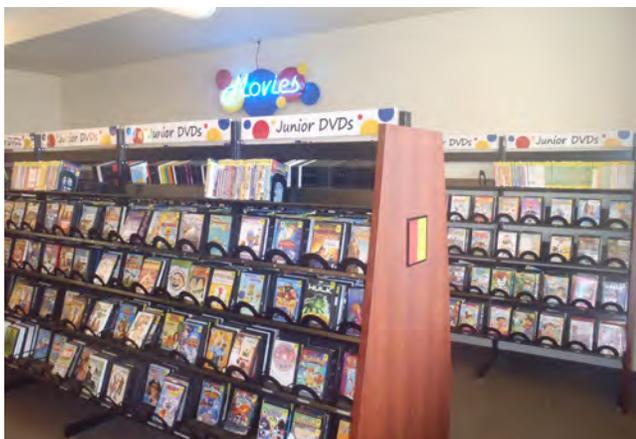
Approachable and Welcoming Service

Approachability, positive communication and the ability to listen and understand the needs of this older age group is the basis of developing strong relationships and lifelong library users.

- ❑ Create a centrally located, friendly service point.
- ❑ Include a self-check station for kids to check out their own materials.
- ❑ Incorporate homework assistance (in-person and over the phone) and other engaging programs for this age group. Remember that programs don’t have to be “formal” and delivered in a traditional sense like storytimes. Think about this age groups’ needs, schedules, etc. and be a little outside the box.
- ❑ Engage in good merchandising techniques, whether by creating a Popular Children’s Library or incorporating face-out merchandising throughout the area.
- ❑ Include digital signage to highlight programs and events that will bring them back for new library experiences.



Barrington Public Library, Barrington, IL
Engaging signage makes it easy to find what you’re looking for.



Ela Public Library, Lake Zurich, IL
Finding interesting books becomes bit more challenging – keeping this age engaged in reading is important. Easy-to-read signage points kids in the right direction. Merchandising your collection helps them find materials that interest them.

ZONING IN ON Children's Spaces: Pre-Teen Space Planning

Inspirational Examples

Those who have adopted some or all of the approaches outlined here are developing user-centered, dynamic, inviting children's libraries and are finding children of all ages and their caregivers using the library more than ever. In particular, a few that are forging ahead and provide inspiration to others include:

Mesa County Libraries – Main Library, Grand Junction, CO

<http://mesacountylibraries.org/kids>

Vestavia Hills Library In The Forest, Vestavia Hills, AL

<http://vestavialibrary.org>

South Brunswick Public Library, Monmouth Junction, NJ

<http://www.sbpl.info/children/tweens>

Old Worthington Library, Worthington, OH

<http://worthinglibraries.org>

Welch Family Children's Wing at the James V. Brown Library, Williamsport, PA

<http://jvbrown.edu/children/index.html>

and <http://www.facebook.com/welchchildrenswing>

Kimberly Bolan Cullin is the principal consultant of Kimberly Bolan & Associates, a library consulting firm based outside Indianapolis, IN. Kim specializes in facilities planning and design and 21st century library service and has consulted with hundreds of public, school and academic libraries.

DEMCO has been serving librarians for over 100 years. We're proud to offer a wide range of products and services to help you create engaging spaces in your library. Angela Schoeneck is Product Development Manager for DEMCO, Inc. in Madison, WI.