

Tips On How To Survive Renovations With Kids

By Rebecca Wamsteker

Got kids? Thinking of doing some renovations? “Don’t do it” your friends and family might say and while they might have a point for many of us renovations are a necessary evil of home ownership. Recently I did some renovations at home and while they weren’t major they meant we couldn’t use our bedrooms for a couple of weeks. While my husband and I had done renovations before, this time we had two little kids in tow and in hindsight there were *definitely* things we’d do differently. So I spoke with clinical psychologist Martine Prunty to develop some tips on how to make renovations easier on the whole family.

Communication

Explain what will happen and why you are doing it

“Children like familiarity so it is important to explain to them why you are making these changes”

Don’t assume that your children will embrace the chaos or roll with the punches. Prepare your child for any upcoming changes to their routine. Begin talking to them a few weeks before, and describe what the situation is going to look like for them, and what will be taking place. In your description use positive language and try to remind them most days until the event takes place. One example might be saying, “Daddy and I thought we might get some new back doors. We will need to take away the old one and make the doorway much bigger. Then once we get the new doors put in they will open all the way up from one end of the family room to the other so you will have so much more space to play, won’t that be great?!” Ensure you remind them that the disruption will only be temporary so that they feel reassured.

Timing

For a lot of children, a major upheaval such as renovating can cause them to feel insecure or anxious because their secure base (ie their home) has become a place of chaos. Children thrive on routine because they know what to expect and what is expected of them. If possible, keep as much of their regular routine as you can, eg swimming lessons, bed time, bath time, etc. This might impact the time of year that you choose to begin your project, depending on the needs of your family.

Our renovations took place toward the end of the school year when everyone was feeling pretty tired. Not everyone will be able to choose when they start or finish their renovations as they might be dependent on their builder or could be waiting on materials. “Choose a time when there is less on for your family, younger children can get overwhelmed more easily when they are tired”

Manage your stress – you are a role model for your children

I don’t know anyone who says renovating was a breeze for them. Parts arrive broken, projects run overtime, tradesmen can be unreliable. Manage your expectations so that when they occur it is less of a shock and you may even have a plan B, even if it’s just some extra time so you are not under unnecessary pressure. Bear in mind that children learn how to cope with stress and uncertainty via the people they spend time with the most. You. Try and remain positive and flexible when you can

and make sure you leave any hysterical conversations with your builder for when your children are not home. And most importantly, shield your children from any heated arguments between you and your partner. Your children will cope better with the ordeal if they see that their parents are coping.

Let Them Help

My 5-year old was desperate to help with the painting and as reluctant as I was to let him loose with a tin of paint and a brush I could see that he really wanted to be involved. I found a nice big wall that we were going to paint anyway put down a lot of drop sheets and after running him through some painting basics away he went. After a couple of minutes he'd had enough and went back to playing with his Lego.

"Finding jobs or ways to include your children will make them feel more engaged in the process"

Young children always love to help. It engages them in the project and makes them feel like a valued member of a family. Consider how you can let your children contribute in an age-appropriate way. For example they might be able to "check" your measurements or paint a wall which you are planning on painting anyway.

Be Part of The Decision-Making

Think of ways that you can involve your children with making some of the decisions. While my husband and I made most of the big decisions, I got my kids involved by showing them a couple of different quilt covers and having them choose the one they liked the best.

Including children in decisions helps their self-confidence because they are given an opportunity to influence their own experience. Choosing colours or items for their bedroom creates a sense of ownership. This often enhances childrens' attitudes about the renovation process in general, because they feel they have been considered and that their contribution feels important to them.