Hangout house: why some homes become

By Lisa A. Flam
Associated Press

Start with amenities like a monster TV or fire pit, add a never-ending supply of munchies and a relaxed attitude toward your kids bringing home a friend — or five — and you may just find that your place has become the place where the tweens and teens want to be.

A hangout house is often the first spot kids think to gather to work on a school project or binge on the latest Xbox game or silly YouTube videos.

"There are some houses that are sort of like magnetic," says Dana Points, editor-in-chief of Parents magazine. "A hangout house is well-stocked, welcoming, casually decorated and not too fussy, and where there's an adult present, but on the periphery."

Sure, with more kids around you can count on some extra cleanup or home repairs, a louder-than-usual roar, and the expense of keeping kids in chips, cookies and (maybe even) baby carrots.

But parents who open their doors to the masses say the upsides are being able to keep tabs on their kids, getting to know their friends well and gaining a peek into their tender worlds.

"I have girls, so it's very important to have them here," said Tammy Smith, 48. "I felt safer with them being here. The best way to keep your kids and their friends where you can see them is to own a pool and a pool house."

Seven years ago, she and her husband built an 8,000-square-foot home on nearly 13 acres in Trussville, Alabama, so they would have room for a heated pool and hot tub. After Friday night high school football games, her daughters would often pile in with eight or nine girls for a swim or sleepover. Besides swimming, the kids could play ping pong, pool or video games.



Stucco covered concrete retaining wallshelp control temperature fluctuations in the Smith hangout house by the pool in Trussville, Ala.
BLACKMON ROGERS ARCHITECTS LLC

"It's nice to know they're safe because they're outside with music on, plenty of food and drink versus a movie theater parking lot," Smith said, adding that now, at ages 19 and 24, her daughters still regularly invite friends over.

Another hangout-house parent, Jeff Kasky, says it's not necessarily what's in his five-bedroom home that makes it a draw; it's his relaxed yet not overly permissive approach.

A father of boys ages 12, 13 and 16, Kasky resides on a kid-filled cul-de-sac in a gated community in Delray Beach, Florida, with his fiancee, who has a 7-year-old daughter. The kids enjoy having friends over, especially the two older boys.

Kids play on gaming systems or watch football on the 120-inch, high-definition TV, enjoy the fire pit, practice musical instruments and "just lie all over the place" on couches and recliners.

"They know when they come over to our house, there's no pretense," Kasky says. "They can just have a good time. It's good, clean fun."

Supervision is crucial during the teen years, when kids may try to sneak sips of a Bud when the lights are low during a movie. Parents can subtly remind kids of their presence by throwing in a load of laundry or offering snacks.

"There are parents who, in order to be the cool house, have had to relax that rule and say as long as you are in the house you can have a drink," Kasky said. "That's not acceptable to me for teenagers."

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