

How you feel about your home is more important than the size

June 21 2019, by Aaron Sorenson



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Although home environments affect the way many feel which, in turn, has the potential to influence family relationships, researchers at BYU recently found that how individuals perceive the space (too crowded or

too spread out) in their homes has more of an effect on family functioning than actual characteristics, such as the size of the house or number of bedrooms.

"You can put two people in the same space but how they feel about that space affects how they interact with their [family](#) members," said Dr. Larry Nelson, a co-author and professor of family life at BYU. "The extent of that finding really surprised me. It was so interesting to me just how much the actual physical structure of a home, and even more so what we think of our home, really affects how we treat one another in families."

To conduct the study, data were gathered over a two-year period from 164 families with children ages 4–6. Some of that data included gathering info on the size of the homes and the number of family members living in the house. Researchers also asked individuals if they felt too crowded or too spread out when at home and 19 more questions about how the family functions, such as "we avoid discussing our fears and concerns" to "we express tenderness." They also included the family's income to the overall data because [socioeconomic status](#) could potentially be connected with home size and home perceptions.

"Before this study, I thought if your home just had the perfect square footage, so much per person, and you were organized, that you would have the ideal home," said Carly Thornock, a former master's student at BYU and co-author of the paper. "While the actual square footage affected families and how they functioned, it was really how they felt about the home in general that had the biggest effect."

The authors of the study recommend shaping a home that helps [family members](#) feel secure, with respected privacy and adequate social stimulation, which can help eliminate potentially harmful consequences for the family. In other words, parents should take advantage of the

physical aspects of the home, including arrangement of furniture, decorations, and overall use of space, to help foster [family relationships](#).

"There's a lot you can do to nurture your relationships with your family without saying anything," Thornock said. "As a parent, if you want your kids to feel close and connected, you could consider putting their pictures on the wall in a highly visible spot in the home."

The authors also suggest certain [home](#) layouts (e.g., open floor plan) when executed properly, can alter the perception of feeling trapped, crowded, or even too far apart from other people.

The study was published in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*.

More information: Carly M. Thornock et al. There's no place like home: The associations between residential attributes and family functioning, *Journal of Environmental Psychology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jenvp.2019.04.011](#)

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