



Preschool and Children's Space at Church



Parental expectations

Every church desires to see growth in numbers. If they are honest, most would prefer to see that growth as young families with children who come to their church as guests become members.

Studies show that a guest makes a decision about returning to a church within the first 7 minutes of arriving on campus — long before they experience the music or sermon. In reality, their decision-making process begins in the parking lot!

One key question that churches need to answer is what kind of impression do they make on guests, especially those with children? Is their facility one that reflects the church's commitment to children's engagement and safety?

If first impressions, excellence in ministry and parental expectations matter to you, check out these considerations for churches that want to reach families.

Room appearance

A key component of a good first impression is the appearance of the classroom. Listed below are considerations for evaluating and updating your teaching spaces to make them welcoming and inviting.

- **Colors.** Are paint and other wall coverings clean and in good condition? Are colors fresh and up to date? Do [colors](#) enhance the teaching environment and classroom behavior? The psychology of colors says that vibrant colors such as reds, oranges and bright yellow stimulate a child's activity level and interest. Cooler colors such

as midrange and light blues, natural greens and lavender promote calming behavior and activity levels. For rooms with lots of natural lighting, consider using soft blues or other cool colors. For rooms with limited natural lighting, consider using soft yellows or other warmer colors.

- **Flooring.** Is the flooring clean, in good condition and visually appealing? If carpet is used, choose carpet that is commercial grade with tight loops, anti-static, stain resistant and anti-microbial. Carpet squares are a good choice for children's classrooms. Floors should be comfortable for seating and activities, easy to keep clean and allow freedom to participate in activities. Vinyl and LVT are also good flooring choices.
- **Rugs and vinyl play mats.** Are rugs clean and in good condition? Are vinyl-padded play mats available in infant rooms to allow for floor play? Are leaders asked to remove their shoes, and are parents encouraged to remain outside the classroom to minimize soiling the carpets in preschool rooms?
- **Clutter reduction.** Are there items that are no longer used but no one has taken the time or ownership to store or toss them? Are there more than a small number of teaching pictures attached to the focal wall? Is there shelving with unorganized materials that need to be cleaned or straightened? Are there outdated resources and announcement sheets that need to be purged? Are there toy boxes or shelves crammed with an excess number of toys?
- **Open space for games/play.** Is there open floor space in the classroom for games and activities?
- **Lighting.** Is lighting appropriately bright? Are windows clean and clear of dated or faded curtains? Does fluorescent lighting "buzz" or flicker in a way that would bother a sensory challenged child?
- **Doors.** Do doors meet [national standards](#) for safe egress? Do doors have a window that provides clear sightlines into teaching areas? If not, is there a window located near the door for easy sight into the classroom? Is the glass shatterproof?
- **Storage.** Is there enough storage for teaching materials? Is there too much storage, perhaps multiple cabinets for multiple organizations, that impacts available teaching space?
- **Signage.** Is signage adequate so that a first time guest can navigate your church without having to ask for directions? Are evacuation routes clearly posted?
- **Bulletin boards, tacks.** Are bulletin boards up to date with fresh materials? Is the backdrop paper fresh, not faded or filled with thumb tack or staple holes? Is tape used to place items on the wall or bulletin boards in "Infant-and-Ones" rooms, to avoid possible choking hazards from thumb tacks or staples?

- **White boards.** Are [white boards](#) in good condition with little “ghosting” from past usage?
- **Murals.** Are murals minimal in presence? Could murals be eliminated from teaching spaces to provide a clear backdrop for teaching and less visual distraction?
- **Age appropriate chairs and tables.** Are tables and chairs in good condition and are they [appropriately sized](#) for the children who use them?

<u>Ages</u>	<u>Seat Height</u>	<u>Table Height</u>
Ones-Twos	7-8 inches	14-16 inches
Twos-Threes	9-10 inches	17-19 inches
Threes-Fours	11-12 inches	20-22 inches
Kindergarten/2nd grades	13-14 inches	23-24 inches
3 rd /4th grades	15-16 inches	25-27 inches
5 th grade & up	17-18 inches	28-30 inches

- **Toy boxes.** Are toy boxes your primary means to store toys? Could they be removed to make toys safely accessible to children by using toy bins and shelving? If a toy box is being used, is it frequently checked for lost or broken toys that need to be discarded? Is it so full that children have difficulty finding and playing with the toys within? Does the toy box add to a sense of cluttered space in the classroom?
- **Bibles.** Are there age appropriate Bibles located for use in the classroom?

Teaching and teaching space

- Ratios of children to leaders, with a minimum of two adults leaders in every classroom:

Babies-Twos:	1:3
Threes-Fours:	1:4
Kindergarten:	1:5
First-Second Grades:	1:6
Third-Sixth Grades:	1:8

- **Classroom size.** Preferred preschool teaching space is 35 square feet per child with an open floor space of at least 12x16 feet. Preferred children’s teaching space is 25 square feet per child based on 80% enrollment numbers with an open floor space for games and activities.

- **Egress.** North Carolina building codes require children in grades one and under to be on a level of egress. Second grade can be one floor higher. A sturdy evacuation crib that can hold multiple children should be located in each infant and toddlers classrooms. Doors should be at least 36 inches wide to allow easy exits in case of an evacuation need.
- **Hallways and corridors.** Hallways or corridors should be at least eight feet wide with controlled access to children's areas, if possible. Using photos or simple geometric designs instead of murals allows hallways to feel less crowded and busy.

Safety

Today's parents would agree that they often parent their children with a spirit of caution. Concern over strangers, sexual abuse, abductions, bullying and mental health issues drive a parent's desire to see their children protected wherever they may be. Here are some steps your church can take to let parents know you value the safety and security of their children within your ministry.

- **Clear sightlines.** Is there a window in or near every teaching space in your church? Is someone assigned to randomly monitor activity in the classrooms, especially those that are empty while children are present, by walking the hallways and looking through the windows without interrupting the teaching occurring within?
- **Check-in equipment and release protocols.** Is there a system used consistently that ensures that the person to whom a child is released has the authorization to pick up that child? Are these strategically placed for convenience of use by parents?
- **Secure cabinets.** Are freestanding cabinets and bookshelves attached to walls to prevent tipping?
- **Cleaning supplies.** Are chemical cleaning supplies stored in overhead or locked cabinets so that children cannot reach them?
- **Stable changing tables with plastic mattresses.** Are changing tables sturdy and stable enough for the children who will need diapering? Is the mat on the table left uncovered so that it can be sanitized between each diaper change? Are necessary changing materials within easy reach of the person changing the diaper?
- **Crib guidelines.** Is there a designated evacuation crib in each classroom with infants and toddlers? Are cribs updated to the latest [government standards](#), 16 C.F.R., part 1219 (full size) or part 1220 (non-full size)?

- **Receptacle covers.** Are electrical receptacles covered so that a child cannot be shocked by placing an object into the plug?
- **Slow cookers and microwaves.** Are slow cooker cords secure so that a child will not pull a slow cooker and its contents onto themselves? Do teachers know not to heat bottles in the microwave to avoid damaging breast milk and creating “hot spots” in the formula?
- **Sharp edges, choking and tripping hazards.** Are these sharp edges on tables or cabinets that need to be covered with bumper pads? Are there rugs or other tripping hazards that need to be eliminated? Are toys and materials frequently checked to make sure they are not small enough to be a choking hazard?
- **TVs.** Are TVs mounted to the wall to eliminate the possibility of falling on children? If they are located on a cart or shelf, are they secure? Is there a low center of gravity to prevent tipping?

Cleanliness

- **Smell.** Do teaching spaces smell fresh and clean and free of musty and moldy odors?
- **Flooring/rugs.** Are flooring and rugs periodically cleaned and sanitized, especially those in preschool spaces where children often sit or play on the floor?
- **Sanitized toys and equipment.** Are toys and equipment in good repair and cleaned on a regular rotation?
- **Trash cans.** Are trash cans emptied each week? Are trash cans that are receptacles for dirty diapers lidded and sanitized periodically?
- **Water source.** Is there a water source or cleaning solution for hand washing or cleaning in the classroom or nearby the classroom that is accessible to both children and adults?

Toy selection

- Is this toy or piece of equipment age appropriate?
- Can this toy be used in a variety of ways?
- Is the toy realistic and not cartoon-like?
- Is this piece of equipment or toy well-made and can it withstand heavy use?
- Does the toy have sharp edges? Are there any small pieces that might be broken off and swallowed by a child? Can the moving parts of the toy pinch or trap a child’s finger?
- Is the toy made from nontoxic and nonflammable materials?

Sensory considerations

- **Lighting.** Is lighting soft, without glare? If fluorescent lighting is used, does it flicker or have a low hum or buzzing sound that could distract a child with sensory issues?
- **Sound dampening.** Are rugs or carpets available for sound dampening or are headphones available for children with sensory needs?
- **Quiet zones.** Is there a plan to provide quiet zones such as bean bags, tents, large pillows or other comfortable items for children who need a quiet area to reset emotions and behaviors?
- **Colors.** The psychology of colors says that vibrant colors such as reds, oranges and bright yellow stimulate a child's activity level and interest. Cooler colors such as midrange and light blues, natural greens and lavender promote calming behavior and activity levels. For rooms with lots of natural lighting, use soft blues or other cool colors. For rooms with limited natural lighting, consider using soft yellows or other warmer colors.

Conclusion

Beyond all physical considerations, the one intangible in providing excellent teaching spaces is the welcoming, accepting attitude of the children's leaders. Prepared, prompt and Christ-like attitudes that make every child know they have a place at church are critical to making disciples. May God bless all you do as you help children "become like a mature person, growing until we become like Christ and have his perfection" (Ephesians 4:13b, NCV).