

Children's

— Grades 1-6 —

Space at Church



**TENNESSEE
BAPTIST
CONVENTION**

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*Pictures in document were taken at the following churches:
Trinity Baptist Church, Raleigh, NC
Snyder Memorial Baptist Church, Fayetteville
Ardmore Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, NC*

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www.tnchildhood.org > Resources > Children's Space at Church

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Grade-School Children's Space: First Impression of Your Church's Ministry

Churches are discovering that to attract young families, they must meet the high standards parents have for children's ministry. Whether parents are looking for a new church or are perhaps exploring the church experience for the first time, they are looking for quality. Their first impression is usually visual—the space in which ministry to children takes place. What does your preschool and children's space tell about your church's ministry?

Walk to the children's hallway or area in your church building. Enter the rooms as if you are a child. What do you feel? Does it communicate that you are important if compared to other areas of your building? Is it cheerful, bright, and clean? Do your senses tell you that something stimulating, relevant, and interesting takes place in this room? Is it inviting?

Now consider that you are a parent looking at this space for the first time as a possible place to involve your child in a ministry. Is it up to your standards for your child? Is it safe, clean, and inviting to you?

There are many factors which affect how children learn. The teacher and curriculum are among the most important influences in the learning process. However, the learning environment impacts the child's readiness as well as influences the learning experience itself.

The following pages are a compilation of suggestions to help you improve the learning environment of your children's classes, hallways, and other ministry areas. Much of what is presented is the ideal, while other ideas are given to help you do the best with less than the ideal specifications.



Children's Education Space Specifications

Organizational Models

Suggested maximum enrollment—24 children

Teacher/pupil ratio—1/6

Model 1

- Grades 1-3
- Grades 4-6

Model 2

- Grades 1-2
- Grades 3-4
- Grades 5-6

Or

- Grades 1-2
- Grades 3-4
- Grade 5
- Preteen (Grade 6)

Model 3

- Grade 1
- Grade 2
- Grade 3
- Grade 4
- Grade 5
- Preteen (Grade 6)

A church may have more than one group per grade level

General Space Information

- Allow for 25-30 square feet per person, based on 80% of enrollment.
- Large, open classrooms are preferable. If you have an assembly room surrounded by small classrooms, consider removing walls. (Check for asbestos before removing walls.) Another option is to remove the doors from the classrooms and pretend it is one large room with small group teaching options in the former classrooms and the large assembly room.
- North Carolina building codes require first graders and younger to be on the “level of egress” or ground level.

Hallways or Corridors



Hallways should be wide and inviting to both children and parents. Hall decorations need to be simple and kept fresh looking. Murals are not recommended since they tend to visually “crowd” a hallway, be expensive or amateurish, and become boring to the children before the church is ready to change it. The hallway should set the stage for the learning and worship that will be taking place, not suggest an area for entertainment.

Use color, changeable, realistic pictures (some on the eye-level of children), or perhaps geometric shapes to make the hallways interesting.

Light and Ventilation

- If possible, provide outside windows in each classroom. Use clear glass with the sills low enough for children to see outside. Mini-blinds or shades can block direct sunlight or glare as well as allow you to control light for films, videos, or other teaching methods that require a darkened room.
- Curtains that block light are not recommended. A short valance at the top of the window will add some color if needed. Window decorations should not block the windows (diminishing natural light) or draw attention from the teaching materials. They should be washed or cleaned often to remove dust.
- Fluorescent lighting with color corrected bulbs will give better lighting of the room without putting a glare or strain on the children's eyes.
- Provide adequate control of ventilation to keep the temperature of the room comfortable.

Floors

Tile or carpeting is acceptable if you accept the limitations. Consider these factors in making your choice:

- **Quality:** If you install carpeting, choose a high grade, durable, stain-resistant quality. Light padding will cushion noise of furniture movement especially on the second floor.
- **Noise and warmth:** Carpeting will reduce noise and provide warmth.
- **Cleaning:** Generally tile floors are easier to keep clean and harbor fewer allergens for people who are sensitive. Whichever floor covering you choose, provide adequate equipment to keep it clean.
- A word about **part-tile/part-carpet** flooring: If you have a sink in the room, you might choose to have tile around that area. Painting and other messy learning projects may be done here. If you do not have a sink in the room and you choose carpet, you may do just as well with a plastic drop cloth for messier activities.
- **Area Rugs:** If you have a tile flooring, area rugs can cut noise and add warmth. They need to be bound on the edges, skid-proof, and removed and cleaned very often.

Walls

The classroom walls are background to the learning or worship experience and should not call attention to themselves. Walls in classroom space should be light, cheerful, and durable.

- **Color:** Consider a color that will be cheerful but not over-stimulating. Bold colors can over-excite some children and be over-powering. Consider pleasing pastels in light or medium intensity rather than intense colors. One wall can be an accent wall using a darker shade of the base color, but not an intense shade.
- **Vinyl wallpaper or paneling:** This is an option as long as you follow the color guidelines given above. Avoid using wallpaper with strong patterns.
- **Paint:** Choose high quality, durable finish paint (semi-gloss enamel) that can withstand bumps, scrapes, and masking tape (unless you provide adequate bulletin boards and display strips around the room). This is education space, not a museum, so visual aids need to be displayed.
- **Electrical Outlets:** Two electrical outlets per room are recommended.
- **Wall murals in classrooms** are not recommended: The subject of the mural will not reinforce what is being taught each Sunday and visuals in a classroom are to be related to each session's lesson. In addition, permanent murals are not easily changed since they are either an expensive professional painting or an inexpensive painting by a beloved church member.

Doors

Solid doors with a window at adult eye-level will be another way to keep the children and the leadership safe. Someone in the hall should be able to see all aspects of the room. In addition the doors should be fire-rated to meet building codes.

Ceiling

Acoustic tiles are most effective in absorbing sound.



Furnishings

You may purchase the following furniture or make your own.

- **Chairs:** You need only one chair per child enrolled. The solid oak chairs are the most durable, but they also are the most expensive. The colorful molded chair seat and back with the metal legs also are a good option as well. Secure chairs that do not tip over easily and have comfortable seats. Folding chairs are not safe for this age child. Chrome legs usually do not scratch as badly as the painted ones. The molded chairs come in a variety of colors. Suggested chair heights measured from floor to seat are:

6—7 year olds (1-2 grade) 12-13" chairs

8—9 year olds (3-4 grade)14-15" chairs

10—11 year olds (5-6 grade) . . 16-17" chairs

However, the chairs should fit the child. When seated, the child's feet should be flat on the floor with knees at a right angle.

- **Tables:** If there is adequate space, tables can be used for Bible study groups. The oak tables are durable, but are not as flexible as other tables. If you purchase the waterproof-top tables, consider those with adjustable height legs. Legs that fold are sometimes helpful for storage or moving, but it is difficult to sit at the ends where legs bump the cross bar. The tabletops should be rectangular and measure 30" by 48" minimum with 36" by 54" preferred. Table height should be set at 10" above the seat of the chairs. The light-colored table tops reflect more light and keep the room brighter, but will need to be wiped clean more often.

Note: If space is a premium, use lapboards instead of tables. They may be made from plywood squares 18" x 12" with well sanded edges, or heavy cardboard squares (the same size) covered with adhesive-back paper.

- **Storage**

- **Closet** - The ideal storage is a closet with shelves to be accessible to all organizations that use the room.



- **Cabinets**

If a supply cabinet is hung on the wall, the bottom should be 50" above the floor. A suggested dimension is 42" x 36" x 18" to accommodate larger paper sizes. They need to be unlocked if possible. Of course, a supply cabinet that sits on the floor also is an option, but they take up additional floor space.



- **Open shelves**—Some supplies should be easily available to children when they are working on Bible learning activities.

Resource books, a supply of assorted paper, scissors, markers, etc. need to be kept on open shelves. Provide a minimum of two shelves: 14" x 19" deep, 42" x 46" high, 3' x 4' long, and shelves 12" x 14" apart. An enclosed backing is suggested.

- **Boards and Supplies for Display or Teaching**

Consider the number of organizations using a room on a regular basis. Provide space for each organization to have a focal wall, using bulletin boards, tack strips, or grip strips. If desired, a small white board can be used by everyone, but they tend to get unsightly quickly.

Generally speaking, children's departments/classes need bulletin boards, tack strips, or grip strips more than white boards. The bottom of the bulletin boards should be hung 30 inches from the floor (to be at the eye level of sitting children). Depending on wall space, each room might have several smaller bulletin boards (3-4 feet in length) on different walls for various organizations. The width of the boards should be 24-30 inches.

- **Wastebasket**

Secure a classroom wastebasket rather than a home size or garbage size.

- **Drinking fountain and restrooms**

While restrooms in each classroom would be ideal, many churches will choose to have common restrooms in the hallway for grade-school children. However, the restrooms and drinking fountain need to be in the vicinity of the classrooms for safety as well as convenience.

If possible, an in-classroom sink is suggested. This allows for clean-up after painting, gluing, or other messy learning activities without the children having to leave the room. Sometimes a sink can be incorporated into storage cabinets and countertops.



- **Optional**

but nice (if you have space)!

- Small table or cabinet for CD players and CD's as well as teaching materials for group time
- Small piano—in working order and tuned—if it will be used for teaching. This is especially helpful for children's music groups.
- Picture file built into cabinetry. Of course, a cardboard box covered with adhesive-backed paper will work well, too.
- Picture rail - Placed 24-30 inches from the floor, the picture rail can be combined with the bulletin board.
- Coat racks or hooks—If they are low enough for children to hang their own coats they need to be protected by a shelf or cubby to protect children that might fall against them.

Basic Supplies

Use **plastic baskets, boxes, and containers** of various sizes to organize the following supplies which will need to be purchased. Other household supplies can be collected as needed (i.e. paper towel rolls, juice cans, shoe boxes, etc.):

Bulletin board paper in a variety of colors	Rulers
Dry erase markers for white boards	Tacks for bulletin boards or tack strips
Water-based markers (thin tip and regular)	Brads
Crayons	Hole punchers
Colored art chalk	Paper clips
Water-soluble and rubber cement glue	Poster board in various colors
Glue sticks	Electric pencil sharpener
Tempera paint (variety of colors)	Staplers
Paint brushes (thin and medium tips)	Index cards
Lined paper	(Avoid glitter for safety reasons)
Manila or drawing paper (9" x 12" and 12" x 18")	
Newsprint (9" x 12", 12" x 18", 18" x 24")	
Typing paper or unlined white paper	
Construction paper (9" x 12" and 12" x 18") in various colors	
Pencils with erasers	
Scissors (blunt and pointed, teacher size and pupil size, left and right handed)	
Sentence strip paper with lines	
Masking tape	
Cellophane tape	
Painter's tape in a variety of colors	

Basic Resources For Children's Departments/Classes

- A Bible dictionary for younger readers such as:
 - The Baker Bible Dictionary For Kids* - Daryl J. Lucas
 - International Children's Bible Dictionary: A Fun and Easy-to-Use Guide to the Words, People, and Places in the Bible* – Ronald F. Youngblood
 - Young Reader's Bible Dictionary* - Peg Augustine

- A Bible handbook such as:
 - What the Bible is All About: Bible Handbook* (NIV edition) – Henrietta Mears

- Simple Bible Maps

- Bible Timeline

- A Bible atlas such as:
 - The Student Bible Atlas* - Tim Dowley
 - Children's World Atlas* by DK Publishing

- Extra Bibles in the translation used in your literature

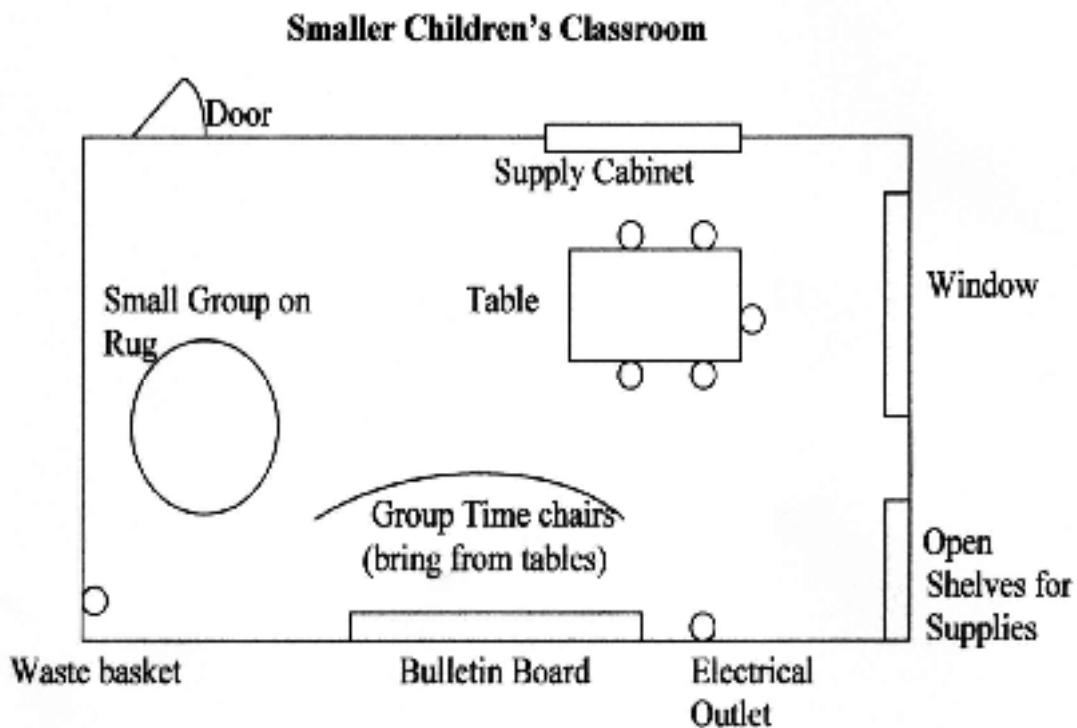
- Books about life in Bible times

- Books with photographs of present-day Palestine

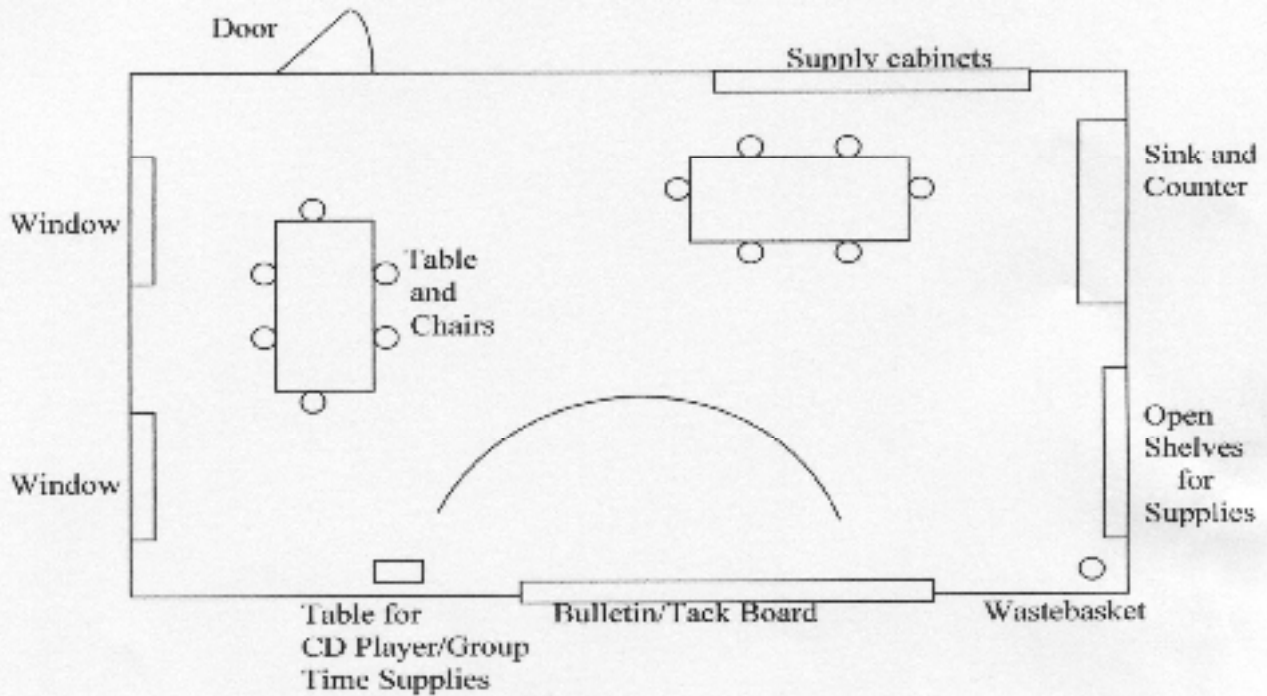
Room Arrangements

Consider these principles when arranging whatever space you have available for teaching grade-school children:

- If you are cramped for space, eliminate unnecessary furniture such as pianos, tables, extra chairs, etc. Children need room to move. Have one chair per child that they can move from activity time to group time.
- Use all of the space all of the time. By moving tables and chairs for different activities, you can have small activity groups as well as large group in the same space.
- Provide easy access from the doorway to Bible study groups.
- Provide both storage cabinets (either standing on floor or hanging above shelves or counters) and open shelves for often used teaching supplies such as extra Bibles, baskets with pencils and/or markers, resource books, scissors, glue sticks, and various types of paper.

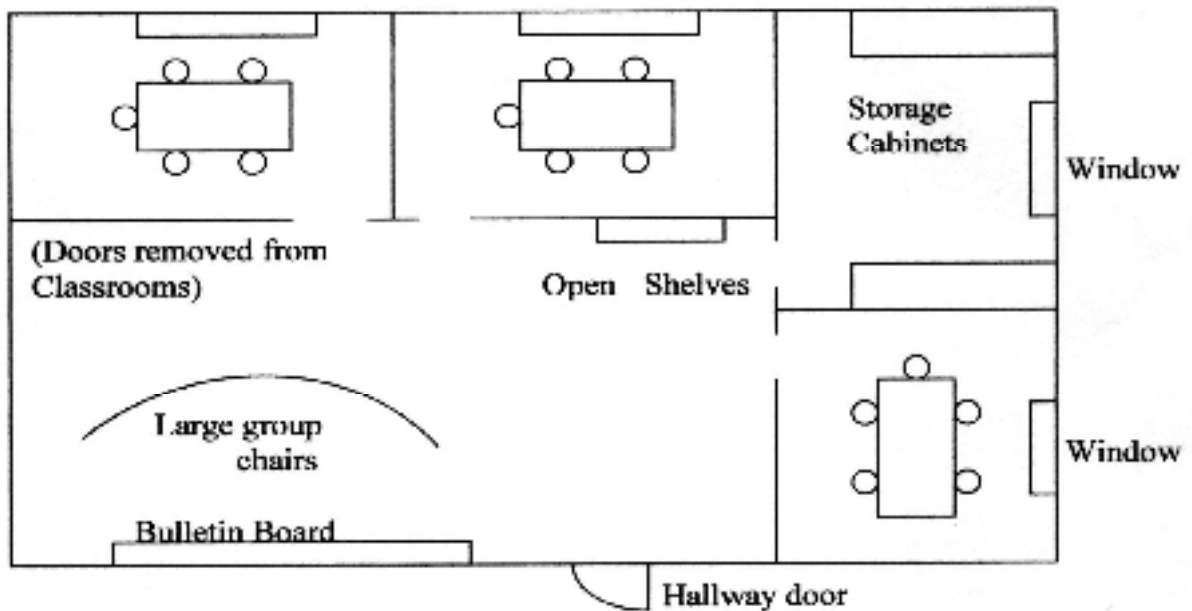


Larger Children's Class/Department



Note: Chairs and/or rugs rather than tables and chairs can be used for small groups if needed for space. Lapboards made of cardboard or other sturdy material can be used instead of tables.

Adapting Assembly/Classroom Structure



Suppliers

The following companies carry furnishings, equipment, and supplies for children's department/ classes. It is not an exhaustive list, nor do we necessarily endorse these companies over others who may be comparable. These are companies of which we are aware and which have been used by churches. You will need to compare costs, quality, and service on your own. Most of them will send catalogs and current price lists.

LifeWay Direct Sales*
One LifeWay Plaza MSN 138
Nashville, TN 37234-0138
1-800-622-8610

ABC School Supply
3312 N. Berkeley Lake Rd.
Deluth, GA 30096
1-800-669-4222

Adirondack Direct
31-01 Vernon Blvd.
Long Island City, NY 11106
1-800-221-2444

Childcraft
20 Kilmer Rd.
Edison, NJ 08808-3071
1-800-631-5652

Community Playthings
1227 East 119th St.
Grandview, MS 64030
1-800-255-6124
www.communityplaythings.com

Constructive Playthings
1-800-448-1412
www.cptoys.com

Discount School Supply
P. O. Box 7636
Spreckels, CA 93962-7636
1-800-627-2829
www.discountschoolsupsupply.com

Kaplin
P. O. Box 609
Lewisville, NC 27023
1-800-334-2014

Early Childhood Manufacturers' Direct
1-800-896-9951
www.ecmdstore.com

Environments, Inc
P. O. Box 1348
Beaufort, SC 29901-1348
1-800-342-4453
www.environments.com

L L Sams and Sons
P. O. Box 1430
Waco, TX 76703
1-800-972-1120

www.LakeshoreLearning.com

Stones School Supply
P. O. Box 37307
Raleigh, NC 27627-3037
919-821-7210 or 1-800-969-4004

A & O Church Furniture
Ken Vernon
P. O. Box 1053
Jamestown, NC 27282
1-800-523-9058

Sauder Manufacturing Co.
4400 Hilltop
Lynchburg, Virginia 24502
1-800-537-1530

Kivett's, Inc.
Dewey Bruce
P. O. Box 590
Clinton, NC 28328
910-592-0161

**NOTE: While LifeWay is not a manufacturer of children's furniture and supplies, they are a distributor for many of the companies listed here. Check with one of their representatives for possible discounts on equipment and accessories for your church.*

Safety Check

Safety should be one of the major concerns of a congregation. Include all teachers of children in a safety walk. Check items which need correcting:

- Protruding nails or other sharp objects
- Sharp corners or edges on furniture
- Broken tile or damaged/loose carpeting
- Peeling paint on walls or furniture
- Unsecured windows
- Cluttered hallways
- Loose rails or steps on stairwell
- Closets and storage areas which are fire hazards
- Damaged electrical outlets or fixtures
- Mold, mildew, or dampness
- Damaged blinds or shades
- Wobbly or unstable shelves and/or cabinets
- Broken chairs or tables (check for splinters)
- Exposed asbestos
- Fire escape route posted and practiced
- First aid kit available to all classes
- Dust (for allergy sufferers)
- Damaged or dirty ceiling tiles or light fixtures
- Unobstructed glass window in classroom doors
- Inspection by fire department for suggestions

The Optimum Learning Environment

- Teachers arrive before the children and learning activities are ready for children to do.
- Children are warmly greeted by teachers using their name.
- The room is bright, cheerful, inviting, neat (uncluttered), and clean.
- All displays and teaching materials relate to the current Bible study unit.
- Posters, pictures, and other teaching aids are hung at the eye level of the children.
- Storage areas are provided and are organized.
- Common supplies are available, labeled, and accessible to children.
- The room is arranged to allow for the best flow of traffic.
- The room is not stuffed with too much furniture—there are some open spaces.
- The classroom furniture is appropriate height/size for the size of children.
- Wall displays are colorful and appealing but are not just decoration.
- Damaged books, chairs, tables, and other materials are repaired or removed.
- There are locations for Bible study groups as well as large group.
- Outdated materials are filed or thrown away.
- Group time is formed facing a focal wall (not a window).
- The room is labeled outside the door, designating the age, grade, or department number.
- Teachers provide a variety of activities for the various learning styles of children.
- There is a teacher/pupil ratio of 1/6.

"The part of a room that counts is not the size or stuff, but the feeling in it."

Elsie Rives, Teaching Children In Sunday School