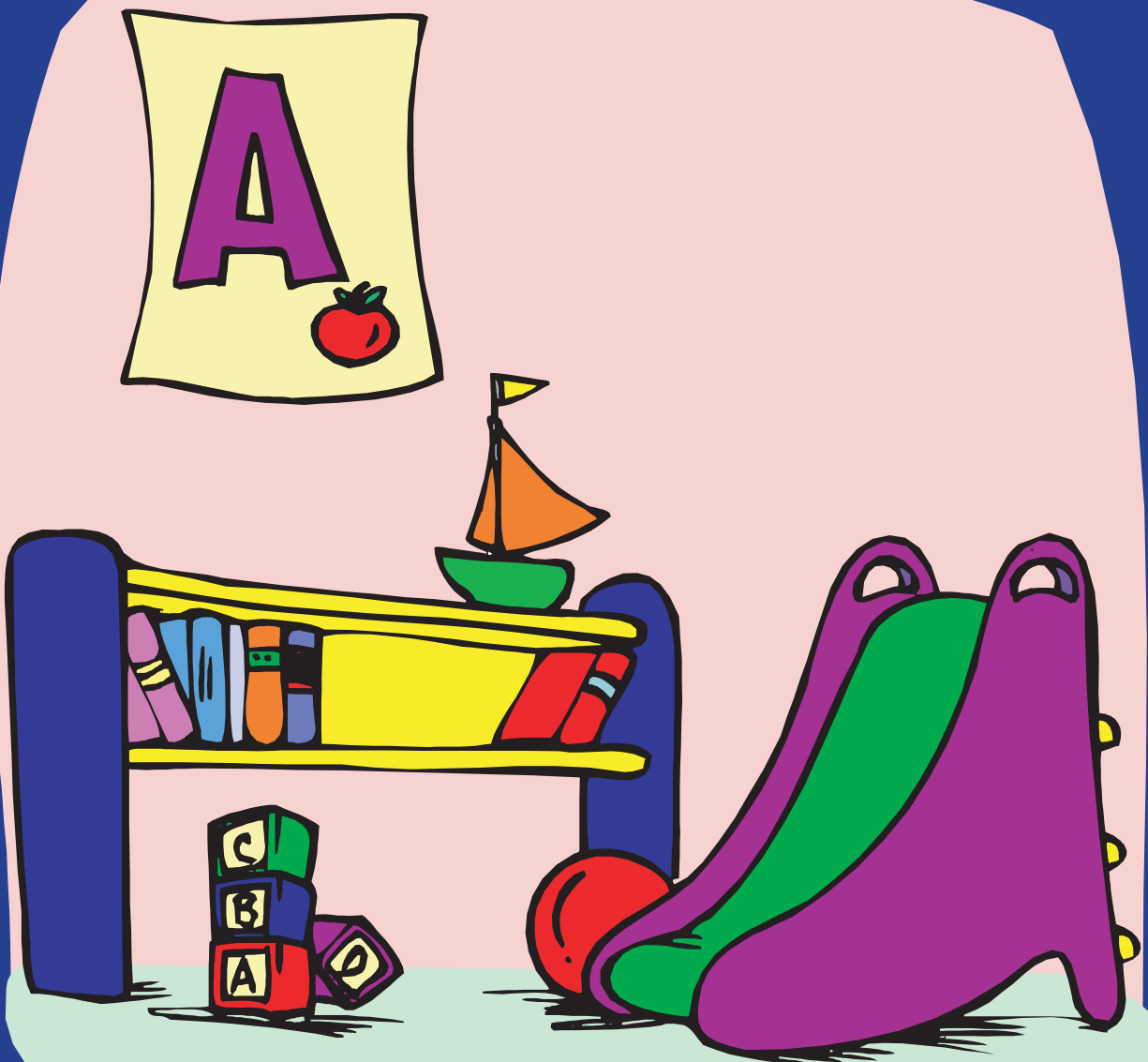


# Creating a Safe Learning Environment for Preschoolers



# Creating a Safe Learning Environment For Preschoolers

## GENERAL GUIDELINES

Provide adequate space near the preschool area to greet guests and enroll preschoolers in the appropriate class or department.

Rooms should be located with easy access to ground level entrances.

Hallways are an important part of preschool space. A narrow hallway causes confusion and congestion and is a potential safety hazard. Check local building codes for specifications.

A solid door with a rectangular window provides for safety and security. Dutch doors aren't recommended due to safety concerns. The classroom door should be wide enough for a crib to pass through in case of an emergency.

Not every church has ideal space for preschoolers'; making the best of what you have is important. Ideally, no preschool room should be less than 12-by-16 feet in size. A general rule for room size is 35 square feet for every child and teacher ENROLLED.

Store toys and other teaching materials in a wall storage unit. Only have out the materials and toys that you expect to use during the session. A wall storage unit in a classroom provides more floor space for active preschoolers.

An acoustical ceiling in a preschool room helps keep the noise level down and helps preschoolers hear sounds within the room.

Rooms should have safety electrical outlets.

Preschool rooms need to be located near a source of water. Restrooms may be built between adjoining rooms and shared. Provide child-sized toilets. Put sinks in the classroom on preschoolers' level. This location allows a preschooler to wash his hands while another child is in the restroom. Paper towels and a soap dispenser should be provided at preschoolers' level.

## FLOOR

The floor covering should be stain resistant and fire retardant, free from bold patterns and designs, easy to clean and maintain. A carpeted floor is warmer, quieter and softer for sitting. A tile floor is colder but is better for "messy" activities such as art cooking activities. A combination of both (2/3 carpet, 1/3 tile) provides for all activities. If carpeting is already on the floor, it should be vacuumed at least weekly and shampooed quarterly. The carpet should be without a bold pattern and have low, tightly woven pile.

## WALLS

Paint walls with washable nontoxic semi-gloss paint. Preschoolers may become more relaxed or more aggressive in response to certain colors. Bold colors, designs, or murals distract from learning activities. Murals do not reflect the sessions Bible teaching aim every Sunday.

Consider the room's exposure to sunlight. Use pastel colors such as blue, green, lilac and neutral colors in rooms, which may get a lot of natural light. Warm colors such as soft yellow and peach will help warm up a room where sunlight is limited. A long narrow room will appear wider when one wall is painted a different color.

## WINDOWS

Windows need to be clean, clear and uncovered to aid in teaching about nature as God's creation. Curtains are unnecessary because they collect dust that may create allergy problems for some preschoolers. Blinds also collect dust and must be cleaned regularly if used. Remember to keep the cords out of the reach of the preschoolers. A good height for windows is 18-20 inches from the floor. Window ledges should be flush with the wall, without molding.

## STORING

Storing resources in a central location will encourage good stewardship of materials. Organizing and maintaining the storage area takes work, time and a bit of creativity. But it is well worth the effort.

## SPACE

Make space a priority. If space is limited, remove chairs and tables. Some activities, such as puzzles and books, may be done without tables or book racks. Place puzzles on the floor. Nature items may be placed on a window ledge. Carpet squares may be used instead of chairs for group time. Art materials may be placed on plastic trays on the floor or at the art easel. Coat racks may be placed outside the room.

## TEACHING MATERIALS

Teaching materials used during a session should relate to the current unit of study. Preschoolers should have easy access to the Bible. Be careful not to mix fantasy materials such as cartoons, nursery rhymes, etc. with Bible teaching. Any visuals should be at the eye level for the preschoolers.

## EQUIPMENT FOR PRESCHOOL ROOMS

A preschool room needs to be equipped with furniture and equipment that will help you achieve effective Bible teaching. Standard equipment needs to remain the same for all preschool ministries that share the room. Choose equipment that fits your space and budget. Refer to page 73 in "Preschool Sunday School for a New Century" by Lumpkin & Sanders.

## POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The forming of preschool policies is an individual church project. Each church will need to develop policies to meet its own needs. Developing preschool policies is an important step in improving the ministry and effectiveness of the Preschool Division of a congregation. Suggested policies can be found in Preschool Sunday School for a New Century.

When forming policies a church should:

- research recommended standards of care. If needed, request information from the state daycare licensing agency; the state child protective services (for child abuse reporting procedures); and other agencies governing fire, electrical, and building codes.
- consult their church's insurance agent.
- consult an attorney for legal advice.
- consult the Center for Disease Control for the most recent studies affecting disease control.
- review policies from other churches.
- have the policies approved by the church during a regular business meeting. Being able to refer to a date of church approval will add credibility to the policies and support to those whose responsibility it will be to follow them.
- see that the policies are well understood by all those who use the preschool facilities.

## SHARING A ROOM

Sunday School/Bible Study, Discipleship, Music, Weekday, Missions and other activities often share rooms at church. Each ministry group deserves the entire room. Remember the room is only yours when you are teaching. When you leave, it becomes another ministry's room. Schedule a time yearly to meet with others who use the same room to talk about sharing space and equipment. Display the agreed upon floor plans and guidelines in the classroom for quick reference. The key to sharing a room with others is to keep the lines of communication open. To help you resist the urge to carry too many supplies and materials into the classroom, keep in mind that psychologists say we are bothered by cluttered, if not consciously, then unconsciously. Visual aids should be current and used for a specific purpose. Any furniture, decorations, or teaching aids not needed by the next use of the room should be removed from the room and stored in a designated area. A supply cabinet for expendable materials (such as construction paper, glue and other items) could be used by all. Remember to treat others as you would like to be treated.

## ROOM ARRANGEMENT

A good arrangement of activity areas and materials in the room helps ensure the best use of the room and enhances learning.

- Place a familiar, attractive area against the wall opposite the department door. The homeliving area is an excellent choice.
- Locate nature materials on the window ledge or on a shelf near a window.
- Group quiet activities, such as books and puzzles, near each other.
- Place more active and noisy activities, such as blocks, away from quiet activities.
- Painting, other art activities, and homeliving may require water. Locate these activities near a water source.
- Have a plain wall background available for group time.
- Space cribs two feet apart with the headboard against a wall.
- In a Ones classroom, provide ample floor space for the preschoolers to practice walking skills. Adult rockers, tables and chairs are safety hazards in a Ones Department.

## PRESCHOOL GROUPING GUIDELINES

- Group younger preschoolers (birth to two years of age) according to their physical development.
- Middle and older preschoolers are grouped according to the system which your church uses for grouping other age groups.
- Whenever possible, a church should provide separate departments for each age group or developmental stage in the Preschool Division.
- No fewer than two adult teachers should be in any department. Set a goal of having a male teacher in each classroom.
- One teacher is needed for every three babies and ones with a maximum enrollment for threes, pre-kindergarten, and kindergarten.
- Twos through fives need one teacher for every four preschoolers enrolled. A maximum enrollment for twos is fifteen per department. The maximum enrollment for threes, prekindergarten, and kindergarten is twenty.

## SECURITY AND SAFETY

### Security system

When adopting a security system, involve the preschool committee/team and other leaders of your church to determine the system that will work best for your church. Security systems should be a top priority in the preschool ministry of your church. Churches of all sizes encounter situations when teachers may not know parents or when a friend, relative or non-custodial parent or grandparent wants to pick up a child. With a security system in place, the church and the teachers remain accountable to the parent and release children only when security procedures are followed. You can find security system suggestions in "Preschool Sunday School for a New Century" by Lumpkin and Sanders.

Suggested security policies usually include:

- requiring that parents or other authorized adults (not siblings) pick up preschoolers.
- requiring that preschool room doors be kept closed. (Provide a small window in the classroom door, giving a view of the entire room.)
- requiring a minimum of two adult non-related teachers in a classroom at all times.
- asking preschool teachers to wear name badges.
- using volunteer or security personnel to provide assistance in church halls, entrances, and near preschool rooms.
- Requiring that restroom doors be partially open when teacher assists child with toileting needs.

## INFORMATION CARDS

Information cards should include where parents may be reached, who may or may not pick up a child, allergies and any other information that helps a teacher meet the needs of the child.

## ENLISTING TEACHERS

### Volunteer Screening Form

Everyone, no matter how long he/she has been teaching preschoolers should fill out a screening form and return it to the pastor or the appropriate staff member. These forms are reviewed by the staff member and are not seen by anyone else. Forms should be kept in a locked, secure location. Once a form is reviewed and screening procedures are completed, then the person may be enlisted to teach.

### Six Month Rule

Potential leaders must be members of the church for six months before working with preschoolers. This allows the church time to check references on the potential leaders. Most child abusers will not want to wait six months to gain access to children.

### Two Adult Rule

Enlist two adults (over the age of 18) for every preschool class. The two adults should not be related. If a husband and wife teach together, a third teacher should be enlisted to teach.

## FIRST AID AND EMERGENCIES

- A telephone must be in or near the preschool area. Post emergency telephone numbers— hospital, ambulance, police, fire department, and poison control center. Include a list of medical personnel within the church who may be called in an emergency.
- Have and maintain fire extinguishers, first-aid kits, flashlight emergency lighting, smoke detectors, and radios.
- Post an emergency escape plan in each room. Parents should know where to meet their children outside the building.
- Equip teachers in the use of fire extinguishers, evacuation procedures, first aid and CPR.
- Doors and hallways should be easy to get through in case evacuation is necessary.
- Have a fire drill that involves the entire church.

## CLASSROOM SAFETY

- Avoid bringing hot drinks into the classroom.
- Use a slow cooker to warm a baby bottle. Liquid gets too hot in a microwave oven.
- Never leave the side of a crib down when a child is in the crib.
- Toys should be in good repair or be removed from the room.
- Toys should be large enough to be safe from swallowing.
- Store cleaning and disinfecting materials on a high shelf.
- Adjust the temperature of the hot water to avoid burns.

## PLAYGROUND SAFETY

- Playground equipment should be six feet away from fences and buildings.
- Place shock absorbent material under equipment and extending six feet beyond.
- Gates should have a safety latch.
- Remove poisonous plants, litter and insect nests.
- Check equipment for sharp edges, missing or loose parts, or deteriorated, splintered wood.
- Cover a sandbox when not in use.
- A minimum of two teachers should be on the playground at all times.

## HYGIENE

Caring for preschoolers include providing a clean environment where the child may explore, create, learn, and play. That means toys, teaching materials, equipment, walls, and floors need to be clean and ready of the child. For disinfecting, use ¼ cup household bleach to one gallon of water. The bleach solution needs to be prepared fresh each session. If there is no chlorine smell, a new solution needs to be made even if the solution were prepared fresh.

### Washing Hands

Hand washing is important in the prevention of the spread of infection. Teachers and preschoolers should wash hands after using the toilet, after wiping noses, and before eating or serving snacks or giving a bottle.

- Use mild liquid antibacterial soap and warm water.
- Scrub hands vigorously for 15-20 seconds.
- Dip hands in bleach solution (1/4 c. bleach to 1 gallon of water).
- Rinse hands thoroughly and dry with paper towels.

If a water source is not available for washing hands, use a spray bottle filled with bleach solution and soapy water and a spray bottle filled with clear rinse water over a dishpan.

### **Cleaning Equipment and Teaching Materials**

In a Baby/Ones Department provide three basins. Fill one basin with warm, soapy water. Fill another with a bleach/water solution (1/4 cup bleach to 1 gallon of water), and the third basin with clear rinse water. During a session, wash, disinfect and rinse each toy after use by a baby. Leave toys to air dry. Change basins of water as frequently as needed. After the session, wash all toys and teaching materials as above and set them aside on a towel or in a dish drainer to air dry.

After removing the crib sheet and all teaching materials, use soapy water, rinse water, and a bleach solution to clean crib rails and all sides of the mattresses. Allow to air dry. Chrome rails need to be dried with disposable towels to prevent rust.

### **Changing a Diaper**

Diaper infants in their cribs. Change older babies and ones on a non-porous surface and sanitize after each use. Use waxed paper on top of a clean diaper and slide both under the child. Roll the soiled or wet diaper in waxed paper and place in a plastic or paper bag in a covered trash container.

Wear disposable gloves. A new set of gloves is required for each diaper change. Teachers should wash their hands after changing diapers even if they have worn gloves.

## **SAFETY WALK**

Safety should be a major concern of a church congregation. Plan a safety walk through the preschool area with the Preschool Committee, preschool teachers and a church staff member.

Search from ceiling to floor for these and other hazards:

- Protruding nails
- Sharp corners
- Broken tiles
- Damaged carpeting
- Leaky ceilings
- Unsafe structure
- Lead paint in any area
- Peeling paint
- Unsafe or unsecured windows
- Blind cords within reach of preschoolers
- Mold, mildew or dampness
- Loose railings in stairwells
- Doorways and hallways blocked by equipment or clutter
- Uncovered or unsafe electrical outlets
- Broken toys
- Unsafe cribs
- Dirty or torn crib mattresses

Can you answer yes to these questions?

- An emergency escape plan is posted in each room
- A telephone is in or near the preschool area.
- Disposable gloves and first aid kits are available in each room.
- An emergency evacuation crib fits through the door.
- The tables and chairs are appropriate heights for age.
- Hot water is set low to avoid burns.
- All toys are safe for use by preschoolers.
- Cleaning supplies are stored out of reach of preschoolers.
- Storage areas are organized and free of clutter.
- Outdoor play equipment is in good condition.

After the "Safety Walk", make recommendations for any necessary corrections. Follow up to be sure changes are made.

# Room Evaluation Form

(form may be copied as needed)

Department or room \_\_\_\_\_

## Facilities

- At least 35 sq. ft. of classroom space is available for each child and teacher enrolled.
- Room is labeled according to age of preschoolers.
- Floors are clean and free of bold patterns.
- Walls are clean, clutter free, have no patterned wall covering or murals, and are painted soft pastel colors.
- Windows are clean and unobstructed with curtains.
- Classroom door has a small rectangular window for safety.
- Door is easy to get through quickly in case an evacuation is necessary.
- There is a water source in or near the room.
- Disposable gloves are available for teachers.
- Crib sheets are removed and washed after each session.
- Cribs and toys are disinfected after each session.
- Crib mattresses are clean and untorn.
- Storage areas are organized and free of clutter.
- Unnecessary equipment and clutter have been removed from the classroom.
- There is adequate space for coats and belongings.
- Chairs and tables are close to specifications shown in *Preschool Sunday School for a New Century*.
- The department room is arranged (as nearly as possible) according to the guidelines given in *Preschool Sunday School for a New Century*.  
If not, what adjustments have been made?

## Teaching Materials

- Teaching materials (books, puzzles, and pictures) pertain to the current unit of study.
- Teaching pictures are filed and easily accessible.
- Bibles are available to use with preschoolers.
- Art supplies and other teaching materials are readily accessible.
- Toys and other teaching materials are large enough to be safe from swallowing.

## Teachers

- A minimum of two adult teachers is enlisted for the classroom.
- Teachers share the room so that no one ministry controls the room.
- Teachers are equipped to teach preschoolers and have read *Preschool Sunday School for a New Century*.
- Teachers have been equipped in emergency procedures.
- Teachers have taken the "Safety Walk" found on page 8 of this booklet.
- Would you want your child to be in this room for Bible-centered teaching?

For more information contact Diane Smith, Children's Ministry Strategist, Emerging Leaders Team  
800.ALL.BGAV Ext. 2256, [diane.smith@vbmb.org](mailto:diane.smith@vbmb.org)



**KINGDOM  
ADVANCE™**  
Virginia Baptists on Mission

Made possible by the generous Cooperative Missions  
gifts of Virginia Baptist Churches affiliated with the  
Baptist General Association of Virginia.

[www.vbmb.org](http://www.vbmb.org)