

MakingRoom Project

Church Starter Kit

Child Development Observation and Support Planning Toolkit

Helping churches notice support needs, plan wisely, and make room for every child.

Important: This toolkit is for ministry observation and support planning. It does **not** diagnose intellectual disability, developmental delay, autism, or any other medical condition. If concerns remain, invite the family to speak with their pediatrician, school team, or licensed specialist.

What is included

1. Observation form for church settings
2. Score guide and support planning matrix
3. Parent/caregiver conversation guide
4. Volunteer quick-reference support card

How to use this tool

Complete this form after at least 1-2 observations in a church environment, or in partnership with a caregiver.

Rate each item based on what you consistently see in ministry settings, not on one unusually hard day.

Higher scores mean greater **observed support need**. They do not confirm a diagnosis.

Use the score bands together with red flags, safety concerns, and caregiver insight before making a placement decision.

0	Not observed / rarely
1	Sometimes
2	Often
3	Consistently / significantly affects participation

Child and family information

Child name:		Date:	
Age / grade:		Observed by:	
Parent / caregiver:		Church / campus:	
Service / classroom:		Follow-up date:	

Tip: If a child has a formal diagnosis, still complete the form from a ministry perspective. The question is not "What is the diagnosis?" but "What support will help this child flourish at church?"

Communication support needs

Rate how often this support need is seen in church settings	0	1	2	3
Needs help expressing wants and needs in age-appropriate ways				
Has difficulty understanding simple directions in class				
Has difficulty answering simple questions				
Relies heavily on gestures, visuals, or alternate communication to be understood				
Speech is difficult for unfamiliar adults or peers to understand				

Social interaction support needs

Rate how often this support need is seen in church settings	0	1	2	3
Does not consistently respond when name is called				
Has difficulty joining peer play or group activities				
Prefers to stay alone most of the time in ministry settings				
Has difficulty reading social cues or taking turns				
Shows limited eye contact or shared attention for age				

Behavior and regulation support needs

Rate how often this support need is seen in church settings	0	1	2	3
Has difficulty moving between activities or transitions				
Becomes overwhelmed in loud, crowded, or unpredictable settings				
Has frequent meltdowns, shutdowns, or intense outbursts				
Displays repetitive movements or fixated behaviors that affect participation				
Needs significantly more support than peers to stay regulated				

Learning and cognitive support needs

Rate how often this support need is seen in church settings	0	1	2	3
Needs repeated prompting to complete age-appropriate tasks				
Has difficulty following 2-step directions				
Learns new routines or concepts more slowly than peers				
Has difficulty staying engaged with teaching or activities				
Struggles with age-expected concepts such as colors, shapes, or simple sequencing				

Motor support needs

Rate how often this support need is seen in church settings	0	1	2	3
Has difficulty with fine motor tasks such as coloring, cutting, or manipulating small objects				
Appears unsteady, clumsy, or poorly coordinated				
Has difficulty with gross motor activities such as walking, running, climbing, or jumping				
Has difficulty sitting with body control during group time				
Needs physical help for tasks peers usually do independently				

Sensory support needs

Rate how often this support need is seen in church settings	0	1	2	3
Is highly sensitive to loud sounds				
Is highly sensitive to textures, clothing, food, or messy materials				
Seeks constant movement, crashing, spinning, or jumping				
Avoids touch or becomes distressed with physical proximity				
Becomes overstimulated easily and needs breaks to recover				

Score summary and immediate support flags

Section	Subtotal
Communication support needs	____ / 15
Social interaction support needs	____ / 15
Behavior and regulation support needs	____ / 15
Learning and cognitive support needs	____ / 15
Motor support needs	____ / 15
Sensory support needs	____ / 15
Total	____ / 90

Check any red flags present (not scored)

- ☐ History of running away or elopement risk
- ☐ Aggression toward peers or adults
- ☐ Self-injury or intense unsafe behavior
- ☐ Unable to stay safe in a typical classroom without added support
- ☐ Very limited communication with high frustration

Parent / caregiver insight

Strengths we see in this child:

Known triggers or common stressors:

Strategies that help this child regulate or re-engage:

Score guide and support planning matrix

Total score	Meaning	Suggested response
0-15	Low observed support need	Use standard inclusion practices with simple classroom accommodations as needed.
16-30	Mild observed support need	Add visual cues, transition support, and regular check-ins.
31-50	Moderate observed support need	Create a support plan and assign a trained volunteer or buddy when possible.
51-90	Significant observed support need	Use an individualized support plan, strong safety supports, and leadership follow-up with caregivers.

Ministry action options

- Independent participation with normal classroom supports
- Small-group support or seating modification
- Visual schedule, transition prompts, or sensory break plan
- Trained buddy / shadow volunteer
- Individualized support and safety plan with leadership involvement

Decision guardrails

Never base a placement decision on score alone. Consider safety, caregiver input, volunteer capacity, and the child's strengths.

If a child is unsafe without added support, create a safety plan first and then decide classroom placement.

If a family reports active therapies, school supports, or a prior diagnosis, ask how church can mirror those supports rather than asking for private records.

Parent / caregiver conversation guide

Start with welcome

We are really glad your family is here. Your child matters to us.

Lead with strengths

We already see great things in your child, especially _____.

Explain the tool simply

We use a short observation tool to help us understand how to support each child well. It is not a diagnosis - it just helps us plan.

Share observations, not labels

We noticed a few areas where church may feel hard right now, especially with _____.

Invite partnership

You know your child best. What tends to help when they feel overwhelmed or frustrated?

Offer a plan

Here is what we would like to try over the next few weeks so your child can succeed: _____.

Close with reassurance

Our goal is for your child to feel safe, known, and loved every time they are here.

Volunteer quick-reference guide

Do this	Avoid this
Use short, calm directions	Talking too much when a child is already overwhelmed
Offer choices and visual cues	Rapid transitions without warning
Watch for signs of overload early	Waiting until behavior escalates before acting
Celebrate small wins and reconnect quickly	Shaming language or public correction

If a child begins to struggle

1. Reduce demands and lower the volume around the child when possible.
2. Offer a simple cue: "Let's take a break" or "First sit, then snack."
3. Move to a quieter space if needed and call the room leader early.
4. Document the trigger, what helped, and any safety concerns after class.