

INTRODUCTION TO THE ON TRACK MAP: CHURCH LEADERS

Toolbox II

Suggested Session Length: 60 minutes

PowerPoint Available: "Toolbox II – On Track Map – Leaders"

Audience: Directors and experienced preschool/elementary DL Lead Teachers

General Topic: How to understand and utilize the On Track Map resource.

Slide 1: Welcome

Welcome participants to the On Track Map training.

Slide 2: Opening Discussion

As a large group, discuss the following question: What are some spiritual goals you have for the kids in your ministry? (i.e., What kinds of spiritual things do you want them to know or be doing by the time they complete 6th grade?)

***Training idea:** As participants respond, write answers down on a whiteboard/chalkboard/large sheet of paper. Acknowledge their answers and thank participants for sharing.*

Slide 3: Transition

The On Track Map is a tool designed to help us think about and work toward specific spiritual targets for kids. It covers key information we want every kid to know and sets goals for how kids can grow spiritually as they live in Christian community as part of the local church.

Pass out a copy of the On Track Map to each person.

Big Picture: What is it?

This booklet is designed for multiple audiences:

1. Child discipleship leaders in the **church** (pastors/directors/volunteers).
2. Parents/guardians in the **home**.

It's a tool for goal setting and assessment:

- It helps answer the question: "What are our discipleship goals or 'targets' for our kids?"
- It helps assess if we are intentionally discipling our kids.

This tool takes the "targets" (discipleship goals) and categorizes them by **topic** and **age group**.

To summarize, the On Track Map is a holistic look at child discipleship. Many, but not all, of the targets (discipleship goals) are addressed in the Discovery Land program and resources. One program cannot meet all the discipleship needs of our kids. Instead, **effective discipleship is a cooperative effort** of parents or guardians in the home, life experiences, structured learning in the children's ministry setting, and other ministries (such as the regular worship service, Vacation Bible School, summer camp, etc.).

As we consider the On Track Map and the targets we are setting for child discipleship in our churches, it is important to think holistically, considering the experience of the whole child.

Slide 4: Big Picture: Who is this for?

This resource is designed for multiple audiences and contexts. As we consider the On Track Map and the targets we are setting, we need to look at it from a few angles.

Training idea: *Hold up a cube (like a Rubik's cube or other cube toy) to illustrate that we need to look at this from multiple sides, or perspectives.*

The perspectives:

1. Senior pastors:
 - a. The On Track Map can help motivate pastors to make child discipleship a priority.
 - b. It can also help them work with their child discipleship staff/volunteers to ensure that high quality discipleship is happening.
 - c. It can also help them use consistent language when communicating vision and priorities for children.
2. Children's Pastors and Children's Ministry Directors:
 - a. The On Track Map can help child discipleship leaders set goals for their ministries and volunteers.
 - b. It can be useful to reference when making programming and resource decisions.
 - c. It also provides for consistent language when training volunteers and teaching kids.
3. Teachers and other volunteers:
 - a. This resource can help volunteers understand where they fit in the bigger picture of child discipleship.
 - b. It can give them helpful language and concepts to weave into their teaching.
4. Parents:
 - a. The On Track Map can help parents see the big picture of their children's spiritual development.
 - b. It can encourage them to make these topics a priority in their home and help them to see the importance of church engagement for their children.
 - c. It can help them understand what is being emphasized in their local church's children's ministry and be an active part of their child's learning.

Training idea: *Survey the group to find out which categories are represented in the room (some people will wear several "hats" - parents, volunteers, pastors, leaders, etc.).*

Our training today will focus specifically on the angle of using the On Track Map in the church setting as children's ministry leaders. A separate training is available to equip parents to use this tool.

Slide 5: Big Picture: What is the end goal?

Ultimately, we want to **help children become followers (disciples) of Jesus in words and actions.**

The On Track Map represents a discipleship path that children walk along as they grow in their relationship with Jesus. The adults in their life help pave this path and establish "guideposts" - truths that our kids can depend on as they navigate life.

Slide 6: Biblical Worldview

As our children grow, we want them to develop a biblical worldview. Discovery Land defines a biblical worldview this way: “To live a Christ-like life knowing and thinking about the one true God which will result in doing and feeling right based on God’s standards, which can be found only in the absolute truth of the Bible.”

Review the 4 Rights framework to summarize a biblical worldview.

The On Track Map provides information that can help establish a biblical worldview in our children. The information children learn in each stage of growth (Birth-3, Preschool, K-2nd, 3rd-5th, 6th) serve as building blocks, gradually building a mature understanding of God’s Word, theology, and life in the local church community as a follower of Christ.

Optional illustration: *Use toy blocks to illustrate how the On Track Map elements connect and build on each other.*

Slide 7: Child Development: Spiritual Milestones

Just as children reach milestones in their physical and cognitive development, they should also reach milestones in their spiritual development. The On Track Map aims to help parents and leaders understand these milestones. However, just like children reach physical and cognitive milestones at different times (children don’t all begin walking at exactly one year old), the same is true for spiritual milestones. Each child will grow in their understanding of God, themselves, and the world at a unique pace. This resource is designed to help us – leaders and parents – know the general progression of things our children should be learning, not *exactly when* they should understand these things.

Slide 8: Child Development: Concrete to Abstract

As children develop, they move from concrete thinking (literal thinking, knowledge is based on facts and observations) to abstract thinking (the ability to consider broader concepts and think with more nuance). You will see this reflected in the On Track Map.

Slide 9: Example - Child Development: Concrete to Abstract

For example, in the first half of the On Track Map, some basic theological concepts are addressed, such as God, the Bible, and salvation.

The younger age groups (Birth-3, Preschool, and K-2nd) have more concrete goals, such as:

- Knows that God gave us the Bible.
- Knows that God is the creator of the world.
- Understands that Jesus came to Earth as a baby.
- Can identify sin and understands that all people sin.
- Understands that God saves us through Jesus.

The older age groups (3rd-5th and 6th grade) begin to understand more abstract concepts in addition to the concrete concepts. These include:

- Recognizes that the Bible reveals God’s big redemptive plan.
- Knows the Bible is proven to be historically accurate.
- Can use Scripture to explain their faith.
- Understands that Jesus is fully human and fully God.
- Understands that we are created to glorify God.

Slide 10: Child Development: Concrete to Abstract

Optional illustration: Use toy blocks to illustrate how the On Track Map elements connect and build on each other.

As you read the On Track Map, it's important to understand that most of these items have different degrees of understanding and application. Christ-followers are always deepening their understanding of God and His Word as we mature and grow. No items in the On Track Map (and no elements of our spiritual journey) are checkboxes that we master, check off, and move on from. However, our understanding and application of concepts will become stronger as we grow. For that reason, children begin to understand and apply the concepts in the younger age groups before they are ready to discover the more abstract concepts in the older age groups. That's why it's helpful to think about these concepts as building blocks. The foundational blocks must be laid before building higher.

Let's Walk Through the On Track Map

Now that we've established what this resource is and who it's for, let's look through the contents of the On Track Map.

Participants should follow along in their On Track Map copy.

Slide 11: Basic Theology

The Basic Theology section of the On Track Map is divided into four sections that address the following questions:

1. Where Do I Find Truth? – This section addresses God's Word, the Bible, and establishes it as our ultimate source of truth. In this section, you will also find things like memorizing Scripture; navigating books/chapters/verses; and knowing about key people, places, and events in the Bible.
2. Who Is God? – This section addresses who God is and includes His attributes, the Trinity, and the Incarnation (Jesus coming to Earth as a baby, fully human and fully God).
3. Who Am I? – This section addresses humanity and includes our creation, our identity, and the problem of sin.
4. How Can I Know God Personally? – This section is all about salvation. It includes the Wordless Book (the tool used in the Discovery Land curriculum to share the Gospel), forgiveness, assurance of salvation, and our identity once we are saved (new creations, children in God's family, etc.). This section also includes Christ's resurrection and the future of the believers (Christ's return, our eternal home, etc.).

Training idea: Divide participants into four small groups and assign each group a different category (one of the four questions) in the Basic Theology section. Each group should read through all of the text within their category, then give a 30-second summary of their category to the larger group. In their summary, groups can highlight their favorite parts of the category or give specific examples of why these goals are important for our students.

Slide 12: Christian Living

The Christian Living section provides life-application points that encourage kids to put their faith into practice as they live as members of the family of God.

Some elements in the Christian Living section are learned by being part of a local church, not necessarily by becoming a believer. Other elements in the Christian Living section are part of sanctification – following and obeying Jesus once we are saved. Some children will come to a saving faith at a very young age and grow through participation in the local church community and through Christ’s sanctifying work, while other children may learn some of these concepts, but not internalize them until they are saved at an older age.

It is very difficult to know when exactly a child is ready to be saved, or even if a specific child is truly saved, so teaching all of these elements together is recommended, trusting that God will “connect the dots” for children when they trust in Christ and begin to live in relationship with Him.

The Christian Living section is divided into the following categories:

1. The Church – This section addresses the local and global church and includes service, believers’ baptism, the Lord’s Supper, spiritual gifts, Christian friendship, and tithing.
2. Prayer and Worship – This section covers prayer and includes the different types of prayer (praise, confession, etc.), key truths about prayer, and establishing a prayer life. This section also covers worship and includes types of worship, key truths about worship, and worshipping God in day-to-day life.
3. Evangelism – This section covers sharing the Gospel with friends, the Great Commission, and global missions.
4. Daily Living – This section summarizes daily obedience to God’s Word and growth as a believer (applying God’s Word to personal situations, demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit, etc.).

Training idea: Divide participants into four small groups and assign each group one of the four categories in the Christian Living section. Each group should read through all of the text within their category, then give a 30-second summary of their category to the larger group. In their summary, groups can highlight their favorite parts of the category or give specific examples of why these goals are important for our students.

Training idea: As a group, discuss the categories mentioned in the Christian Living section. Talk about why each category is important in raising resilient disciples of Jesus. Encourage participants to consider the following: In your children’s ministries, do you do a good job of focusing on each of these categories? (Optional: Ask participants to evaluate how well their ministry addresses each category by holding up a sheet of colored paper - red, yellow, or green - to indicate if their ministry is weak, acceptable, or strong in each category).

Slide 13: Where is this in Discovery Land?

Optional illustration: Bounce a small ball several times to illustrate the idea of short, frequent repetition. This is how On Track Map topics are reinforced in many ways throughout the Discovery Land program.

1. Woven into the weekly lessons
 - In the Lesson Introduction section, when students are asked to identify the Old or New Testament, to find the lesson on the timeline, and to find the passage in their Bibles, these are all On Track Map skills that are being reinforced.
 - As you teach, once you're familiar with the On Track Map, you will begin to notice elements of the Basic Theology section woven into the Bible Lesson outline.
 - When life application is discussed (often in the Conclusion and Do Right/Feel Right sections), you will see many of the Christian Living elements.
2. In the On Track Map review questions
 - The appendix of your curriculum includes quarterly review questions that cover various topics addressed in the On Track Map. These questions are typically used during the pre-service review game and the end-of-class review game.
***Note:** If time allows, this is a good opportunity to highlight the end-of-class review games in the back of the quarterly curriculum.*
3. In Tracker's Treasures and Tracker Jr.
 - Almost every edition of Tracker's Treasures and Tracker Jr. includes a "Get on Track" section. This section has a short note about various On Track Map topics and will sometimes include an activity to help students grow in that area or understand it better.
 - In addition to the specific Get on Track sections in the weekly take-home papers, by completing the Family Challenge and other activities included in Tracker's Treasures and Tracker Jr., kids will grow in many of the elements covered in both the Basic Theology and Christian Living sections. There are often challenges to pray for others, invite others to church, practice obedience, etc.
4. In the topical On Track Map lessons
 - There are typically two topical lessons in each quarter. These lessons often take place on transitional weeks or holiday weeks. The topics vary but are often based on the On Track Map.
 - The goal of these lessons is to address a topic that might not come up as often in the regular lessons or to dig deeper into a specific concept or book of the Bible.
 - Some of the topical lessons are: Fruit of the Spirit, Big Picture of the Bible, Christmas, Easter, Psalms, Heaven, Worship, Proverbs, Stewardship, The Lord's Prayer, When Tragedy Happens, The Church, Sharing Your Faith, etc.
5. In our Leaders' Training
 - On Track Map elements were woven into the leaders' training as they were being developed. Some of these elements are as follows:
 - Building meaningful relationships with kids.
 - Creating a safe and loving church community.
 - Praying for students.
 - Sharing the Gospel consistently and giving the invitation to salvation.
 - Providing opportunities for students to consider if God is calling them to missions.
 - Using your gifts to serve God and others.
 - The On Track Map also influences *how* we talk to kids - it gives us unifying language and structure to how we explain things.
 - **Director's Note:** Learning to use consistent language is very beneficial for leaders and should be included in leader training!

Optional Break Activity: *If time allows, this is a good place to take a quick break and play a fun review game on what's been covered so far in training.*

Slide 14: Bringing this Tool to Life for Kids

Let's return to the cube analogy. Now that we understand the angles of this tool and some ways it is used in the Discovery Land program, what should we **do** with this resource?

- Pastors and directors:
 - Read it ... often! The more familiar you are with these elements, the more naturally you will weave it into your conversations with parents and volunteers.
 - Share it! Have copies of this resource available in public locations in your ministry. Bring it to meetings with church leadership. Give it to parents who come to you with questions or to new families.
 - Own it! Use this tool to set clear expectations and goals for your own ministry. Use this tool to influence what you prioritize and how you cast vision for your team.
 - Use it! Incorporate small pieces of this resource into your weekly volunteer emails, or write one goal on a whiteboard for volunteers to see as they arrive each week. Let this resource help you identify areas for growth.
 - Example: If you notice kids sitting alone during the pre-service review game, disengaged, why is that an issue? It's an issue because if we're part of God's family, nobody should be left out or sitting alone at any time during the morning. You can point this out to leaders, use the On Track Map to establish the "why", and then propose a new plan for engaging and welcoming students.
- Teachers and other leaders:
 - Review it regularly! This tool can help you identify potential weak spots in your teaching - is there an area of salvation or life application or spiritual growth that you forget to talk about? Let the On Track Map remind you of big picture values.
 - Know your age group. If you serve with a particular age group, be aware of the goals for them. What should they have learned in the previous age group that you might need to review? Remember, this is not a prescriptive checklist, but instead a general path of discipleship.
- Parents:
 - As church leaders, we can equip parents with this tool. A separate training on the On Track Map is available just for parents.

Slide 15: Common Questions

- **What about children who start late?**
Optional illustration: Use toy blocks to illustrate how the On Track Map elements connect and build on each other.

Since this is not a checklist, but a discipleship path, children who start late will be just fine. People who come to know Jesus as their Savior at an older age, or as an adult, mature and grow just like children do who come to know Jesus at a very young age. The elements of the On Track Map are like building blocks - which means elements from earlier age groups will be reviewed as we build upon prior knowledge. Ultimately, we trust God to fill in the gaps. He does this faithfully with each of us, and we can trust Him to take care of our children.

- **What about children whose parents/guardians aren't believers?**

In a perfect world, the discipleship of children is a collaborative effort between parents and the church family, with life experiences and other ministry experiences woven in. Unfortunately, in a world broken by sin, we know that there will be children in our ministries who do not receive support at home.

A few thoughts for church leaders who are discipling kids in these contexts:

1. This is why "Total Time Teaching" is essential. These children may only hear God's Word when they are in your classroom. Use your time well.
2. Meaningful relationships with adults in the church family are vital for these kids. The time, attention, and consistent presence of trusted leaders make a significant impact.
3. Pray! God works in powerful ways, and He invites us to be part of this Kingdom work, both through our service and our prayers. You can trust Him with these kids as you faithfully point them to Jesus.

- **What if my church believes something else about ____?**

There isn't an option to personalize the On Track Map file, but you are welcome to use this tool as a foundation to create your own. Or you may put an insert into the OTM that addresses the unique theological differences within your church. We strongly recommend working with your pastor and church leadership when making changes or additions.

Additional Time for Q&A

Allow participants to ask additional questions for a few minutes, then close in prayer.