

PARENT TRAINING: INTRODUCTION TO THE ON TRACK MAP

Suggested Session Length: 30-45 minutes

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

Audience: Parents of DL students

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 your children? (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.*

Slide 3: Big Picture: What is the On Track Map?

Acknowledge their answers and thank participants for sharing.

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.

This tool takes these "spiritual targets" and categorizes them by **topic** and **age group**.

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

The On Track Map is meant to be used in the **home** and in the **church**. Many, but not all, of the spiritual targets 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/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, Christian music, summer camp, etc.).

This tool also helps church leaders set goals and train volunteers, so they are providing effective, meaningful discipleship for your kids.

Slide 4: Big Picture: The On Track Map for Parents

The On Track Map can do the following things for parents:

1. Help you see the big picture of your child's spiritual development.
2. Encourage you to make these topics a priority in your home.
3. Help you see the importance of church engagement for your children.
4. Help you discern what you want to see emphasized in your church's children's ministry.
5. Help you be an active participant in your child's spiritual development in the church.

It's so easy to be distracted by the many opportunities and responsibilities we have as families. We all struggle with balancing these things, and we all need help getting re-focused on God's priorities for our families. The On Track Map can help us do that.

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. For example, if your child is part of a sports team and they play poorly in a game, the 4 Rights framework can help guide their response to their feelings of disappointment and frustration. Instead of seeing them get stuck in a place of shame and anger, we can train our children to remember what they know (Know Right) - that they have been created with purpose, by a God who loves them even when they don't meet their own expectations. Then they can choose to think about a verse from Scripture that reminds them of this, like Psalm 139:14 (Think Right). Then, your child can decide to let these truths impact their actions (Do Right), and they can choose to thank their coach or congratulate a team member. When they've paused to work through these patterns of thinking and behavior, they might still feel disappointed, but they can also feel comforted (Feel Right).

In that example, all of the things your child chooses to remember and do are things they've learned because they are things prioritized in the On Track Map. We can filter what we've learned through the 4 Rights framework. This practice will develop during childhood but can be carried into the teen years and adulthood. As life becomes more complicated, sometimes even feeling hopeless, the 4 Rights framework can help us remain grounded in truth.

Slide 7: Child Development: Spiritual Milestones

Children have spiritual milestones in their development, just like they have physical and cognitive milestones. The On Track Map can help us 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. Children will grow in their understanding of God, themselves, and the world at a unique pace. This resource is designed to help us 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

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

You will notice that the concepts in the On Track Map become more complex and abstract as you move into the older age groups. This is because kids begin to 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) as they age. For example, a young child will learn that God gave us the Bible. An older child will learn that the Bible – both the Old and New Testament – reveals God's big plan of redemption for us. A plan of redemption that unfolds over thousands of years is a pretty abstract concept!

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 on the On Track Map (and no elements of our spiritual journey) are checkboxes that we master, check off, and move on from. Here are a few examples:

- We want children to understand that God is just - but their understanding of His justice will continue to grow as their faith grows.
- We want children to know that they are filled with the Holy Spirit when they are saved - but their interaction with the Holy Spirit and obedience to His guidance will not be complete until they reach heaven.
- We want children to desire to serve God in the local church and to find opportunities to share their gifts in the local church - but they will never be done being part of the local church family.
- We want children to worship God in their daily life - but they will never be finished worshipping!

Even though we'll never master these kinds of things here on earth, 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 recommended to think about these concepts as building blocks. The foundational blocks must be laid before building higher.

Let's Explore the On Track Map

Now that we've established what this resource is and who it's for, we're going to summarize the contents of the On Track Map. We recommend sitting down and reading through the On Track Map in more detail by yourself once you've completed this training.

Participants should follow along in their On Track Map copy.

Slide 9: 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 the Bible. It establishes God's Word as our ultimate source of truth. In this section, you will also find things like Scripture memorization, navigating books/chapters/verses, and knowledge of 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 we use in Discovery Land to share the Gospel), forgiveness, assurance of salvation, and our identity once we are saved (new creations, children in God's family, etc.).

Slide 10: Christian Living

The Christian Living section discusses how kids should put their faith into action.

Kids who have already trusted in Jesus as their Savior are learning how to live out these elements of their faith.

Kids who have not trusted in Jesus as their Savior will learn these concepts, and hopefully will be able to live them out in the future if they trust Jesus as their Savior, when they are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Christian Living section is divided into the following categories:

1. The Church – This section addresses the local and global church and includes service, believer's 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 personally with friends along with 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.).

Slide 11: The On Track Map at Church

Optional illustration: Use a bouncy ball to illustrate how brief, frequent repetition is used to reinforce On Track Map topics in many ways in the Discovery Land program.

Many of the elements covered in the On Track Map are woven into the Discovery Land curriculum:

1. The weekly Bible lessons.
2. The review questions we use in our review games at the beginning and end of Discovery Land.
3. The weekly take-home papers (Tracker's Treasures and Tracker Jr.).
4. Topical lessons; we teach several of these every year. They include topics like: Fruit of the Spirit, Heaven, and Stewardship.

Discovery Land leaders are trained to understand the On Track Map and how to weave it into their teaching.

Slide 12: The On Track Map at Home

As a parent, what can you do with the On Track Map?

The most important thing is to become familiar with what the On Track Map covers. We recommend keeping a copy of the On Track Map at home and reviewing it during transitional times (such as when your children transition grades or have birthdays).

As you become familiar with the spiritual milestones outlined in the On Track Map, you can use this tool to set a few goals for your family.

1. What do you want to talk about at home?
2. What do you want to prioritize as a family?
3. How do you want to grow as a follower of Christ? (You get to model these elements for your child!)

Remember, child discipleship is a **collaborative effort**. You don't need to try to cover *everything* in this booklet. Your intentional discipleship at home will influence your child's growth, but so will their learning at church and through other life experiences and ministry interactions.

With this collaborative effort, know that **relationships are key**.

1. Parents' relationship with their child is instrumental in shaping the child's faith. You have the privilege of introducing them to Jesus and of modeling what it looks like to live in relationship with Him.
2. Parents also have significant influence over the relationships in their child's life:
 - a. Relationships with adults - meaningful relationships with Christian adults will help your child's faith grow deeper and be longer-lasting (they are more likely to stay involved in the local church if they have meaningful relationships with Christian adults in their community).
 - b. Relationships with peers - you can help your child build strong Christian friendships!

As you navigate parenting, remember that your church has your back! Get to know the pastor/director* that oversees the children's ministry at your church and find out what they value and prioritize in the ministry. Connect with your child's leaders and find ways to help your child grow at home.

**If you (the trainer) are the person that parents should talk to, personalize the above section. Give parents practical ways they can connect with you to talk more about what is and isn't emphasized in your church's children's programming.*

Time for Q&A

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