



MIND



BODY



SPIRIT

The Whole Child Check-In

A whole-child observational tool for parents,
teachers, and those who care for children ages 5–18

MIND

Thinking & Learning

BODY

Regulation & Sensing

SPIRIT

Identity & Faith

Child's Name

Age

Date

Completed by

Relationship to child

This is not a diagnostic tool — it's a lens. Use it to notice, wonder, and respond to the whole child in front of you. Where you see patterns of 'Rarely' or 'Sometimes', that is where this child may need more support, connection, or understanding.

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• Thinking, Learning & Emotional Understanding

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Can focus on a task for an age-appropriate amount of time <i>e.g. 10–15 min for ages 5–7, 20–30 min for older children</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Can hold and follow multi-step instructions <i>Remembers what they were asked to do without constant reminders</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Can shift flexibly between tasks or activities <i>Transitions without significant distress or shutdown</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Can name or identify their emotions in the moment <i>Uses words, not just behaviours, to express how they feel</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Appears to understand cause and effect in social situations <i>Grasps why certain actions affect others</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Shows curiosity and engagement in learning <i>Asks questions, explores, initiates — not just complies</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Recovers from mistakes without excessive distress <i>Bounces back rather than shutting down or exploding</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Appears to have a positive view of themselves as a learner <i>Tries new things; doesn't catastrophise difficulty</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always

WHAT TO EXPECT AT DIFFERENT AGES

	Ages 5–7	Ages 8–11	Ages 12–15	Ages 16–18
Focus & memory	10–15 min; play-driven; multi-step instructions emerging	20–30 min; growing working memory	30–45 min; highly context- and interest-dependent	Capable of sustained focus; increasingly self-directed
Emotional literacy	2–3 emotions named with adult support	Vocabulary growing; 4–6 emotions identified	Complex emotions; peer-influenced; harder to read	Near-adult complexity; may mask or suppress feelings
Flexibility	Transitions hard; need forewarning and routine	Improving; manages change with support	Can adapt when consulted; resists imposed change	Strong autonomy drive; logic and negotiation more effective

MY OBSERVATIONS

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Children who struggle with focus or flexibility are often not being defiant — they may be experiencing executive function challenges. Research by Adele Diamond shows that executive function skills (working memory, cognitive flexibility, inhibitory control) are among the strongest predictors of later life outcomes — more so than IQ. These skills develop well into the mid-twenties and respond powerfully to supportive relationships.

What patterns are you noticing? What stands out?

BODY

Regulation, Sensory Processing & Physical Wellbeing

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Responds proportionately to sensory experiences <i>Not overwhelmed by sounds, textures, lights, or touch that others don't notice</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Can identify basic physical signals in their body <i>Hunger, tiredness, needing the bathroom — without prompting from adults</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Regulates their nervous system with adult support <i>Calms down within a reasonable time when co-regulated by a trusted adult</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Shows a settled, regulated baseline most of the day <i>Not consistently hyper-aroused (anxious, bouncy) or shut down (flat, withdrawn)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Tolerates physical transitions well <i>Can move between environments (classroom to playground) without significant dysregulation</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Sleep patterns appear reasonably consistent <i>Falls asleep, stays asleep, wakes without extreme difficulty</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Eats a range of foods without high distress <i>Mealtimes are not consistently a source of major struggle</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Responds well to predictable, physical routines <i>Structure and rhythm help them feel safe and regulated</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always

WHAT TO EXPECT AT DIFFERENT AGES

	Ages 5-7	Ages 8-11	Ages 12-15	Ages 16-18
Regulation	Heavily co-regulation dependent; meltdowns are normal	Growing self-regulation; stress still triggers dysregulation	Puberty disrupts nervous system; big swings are typical	Greater capacity; still maturing (frontal lobe develops to ~25)
Sleep	10-11 hrs needed; bedtime resistance is common	9-10 hrs; screen and activity pressure emerging	Biology shifts to later sleep times; 8-10 hrs still needed	Late chronotype; early school starts create chronic sleep debt
Sensory	Sensitivity still calibrating; texture and sound issues common	Most have integrated sensory input; notable exceptions persist	Sensitivities can shift or spike with puberty	More stable; increasingly self-aware of personal triggers

MY OBSERVATIONS

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory explains that children's behaviour is first and foremost a function of their nervous system state — not their character. A child who seems 'difficult' at 3pm may simply have exhausted their regulatory resources across the day. Co-regulation — an adult's calm, attuned presence — is the primary way children's nervous systems learn to self-regulate. This is not a luxury; it is a biological necessity.

What physical or regulatory patterns do you notice?

SPIRIT

• Identity, Belonging & Faith Formation

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Has a sense of being loved and valued unconditionally <i>Not just for performance, achievement, or behaviour</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Shows awareness of something bigger than themselves <i>Asks questions about meaning, purpose, God, or why things happen</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Feels a genuine sense of belonging in your home, class, or faith community <i>Is known, welcomed, and included — not just tolerated</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Has a developing sense of who they are <i>Beginning to understand their identity, character, and values</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Can name things they are grateful for <i>Gratitude is accessible even in ordinary moments</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Shows care or compassion for others <i>Notices when others are hurting; moves toward rather than away</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Has space to ask hard questions about faith, God, and suffering <i>Questions are welcomed rather than shut down</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always
Experiences prayer, scripture, or worship as something meaningful <i>Not just a ritual — a living encounter with God</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Always

WHAT TO EXPECT AT DIFFERENT AGES

	Ages 5–7	Ages 8–11	Ages 12–15	Ages 16–18
Faith	Concrete, story-based; God experienced as close and personal	Literal thinking; honest questions begin; enjoys exploration	May feel embarrassed about faith publicly; significant doubt is normal	Deepening into personal ownership or quietly drifting — both are common
Identity	Defined largely by family, preferences, and play	Expanding to include school, sport, and friendships	Rapid formation; strongly shaped by peers and culture	Consolidating values and beliefs; identity becoming stable
Belonging	Home-centred; peer friendships just beginning	Peer belonging growing in importance	Peer acceptance can feel existential; rejection is intensely painful	Quality over quantity; seeking meaningful, authentic connection

MY OBSERVATIONS

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Research by Christian Smith et al. (National Study of Youth and Religion) found that adolescents with a meaningful, personal faith — not just inherited religion — showed significantly better outcomes in wellbeing, resilience, and moral reasoning. The key variable was not religious attendance alone, but whether faith was experienced as a living, personal reality. Belonging precedes believing for most children: community comes before creed.

What are you noticing about this child's spiritual and relational world?

What Now?

Reading your results and taking next steps

HOW TO READ YOUR RESULTS

Look across all three sections. Where are the **Rarely** and **Sometimes** answers clustering? That clustering is the signal — it's where this child may need more support, more connection, or a different approach. No child will score 'Always' across everything, and that's perfectly normal. The goal isn't a perfect score — it's a clearer picture of this particular child, right now.

Conversation Starters

- "What part of your day feels the easiest for you right now?"
- "Is there anything at school (or home) that feels really hard?"
- "When you're feeling big feelings, what helps?"
- "What do you think you're really good at?"
- "Is there anyone you feel really safe with?"

What You Can Do Today

- Name what you observe without judgment: "*I notice you seem tired lately.*"
- Reduce demands during high-stress periods — connection before correction.
- Build one predictable, calming routine into the day.
- Ask teachers or other carers what they notice — patterns matter.
- Celebrate what IS working — name strengths out loud.

Go Deeper

- **Attachment Theory** — understanding your child's relational world
- **Co-Regulation** — how your calm creates their calm
- **Emotional Literacy** — building a feelings vocabulary
- **Sensory Processing** — when the world feels too much
- **Christian Formation** — nurturing the whole spiritual self

YOU'RE NOT DOING THIS ALONE

The Childscape exists to help parents, teachers, and church leaders understand children more fully — and respond more wisely. Explore our free articles at thechildscape.com, or join our community to receive new resources, tools, and practical insights as they are released.