



McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership

TIPS FOR USING THE SCHOOL-AGE CARE ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE

- **Be sure there are interest centers with a clearly defined purpose.** An interest center is a place where materials are arranged for use within an appropriately equipped play space. Centers should promote independent use by children. For example, an art interest center would have art materials near easels or tables. If homework is part of the program, a quiet space with suitable furniture should be provided.
- **Be sure that materials in the program are accessible.** To be considered accessible, children must be able to get the materials easily by themselves. If materials are stored in closed spaces, they can be considered accessible only if it is observed that children can freely access and use the materials when allowed. This access must be provided as part of the usual daily (or almost daily) practice.
- **Don't confuse art and crafts.** Even though school-age children are able to follow instructions and patterns to create a specific craft project such as a wallet or bracelet, they should have a variety of art materials accessible for free choice to use for individual expression on a daily basis. To receive credit for this indicator, a variety of arts and crafts materials must be accessible for free choice daily. A variety of arts and crafts materials means there are three to five different materials from at least four of the five categories: drawing materials (e.g., paper, crayons, felt pens, pencils); paints (e.g., tempera, watercolor); three-dimensional materials (e.g., clay, play dough, wood gluing, carpentry); collage materials; art tools (e.g., scissors, glue, tape dispensers, staplers, hole punches) and materials for at least one craft project (e.g., embroidery, weaving, origami, or jewelry making).
- **Remember to follow proper handwashing procedures.** According to Illinois licensing standards, the following technique for thorough handwashing shall be used: wet hands under warm running water; lather both hands well and scrub vigorously for at least 15 seconds; rinse hands thoroughly under warm running water. Dry both hands with a new single-use towel or automatic dryer. For hand-held faucets, turn off the water using a disposable towel instead of bare hands to avoid recontamination of clean hands. Using antiseptic waterless washes, gloves, or wipes does not count as a substitute for handwashing.

Proper handwashing procedures are to be followed upon arrival at the center; when changing rooms or caring for a different group of children; before and after meals; before preparing, serving, or handling food; after toileting; when re-entering the center after outdoor play; before shared water play and after messy or sand/water play; after dealing with bodily fluids (Ex. running noses, vomit, blood), after handling or caring for a sick child; before dispensing any medication; before and after administering first aid; and after touching contaminated objects (trashcan lids, the floor) or pets.

- **Don't forget to use proper procedures for meals/snacks.** Tables should be washed with a soap-water solution, dried with a paper towel, and sanitized with a bleach-water solution before and after being used for meals/snacks. The bleach-water solution must be allowed to sit for at least ten seconds before being wiped dry. Children should not be allowed to eat snack on the floor and food should not be placed directly on the table surface without a plate, paper towel, or napkin. In the case where snack times are flexible and children come and go throughout a period of time, the table must be sanitized between children using the same places.

- **Keep in mind that an outdoor area should be used for gross motor activities daily year-round, weather permitting.** In Illinois the term “weather permitting” means temperatures between 25 and 90 degrees, taking into consideration the wind chill. For example, if the temperature is 30 degrees, but 18 degrees with the wind chill factored in, it is not expected that children have outdoor play time.
- **Be aware of potential safety issues.** Medicines and other hazardous substances must be kept in a locked storage space; evacuation procedures should be practiced monthly at times when school age children are present. For potential safety hazards outdoors, please visit the Environment Rating Scales Website: <http://fpg.unc.edu/~ecers>. Click on SACERS, Supplementary Materials, and Playground List to see “Playground Information to Use with the Environment Rating Scales”. If the playground has a poured or installed foam or rubber surface, site-specific documentation must be provided to verify that ASTM F1292 requirements are met.
- **Children should have access to a variety of music and movement activities.** Music materials (e.g., dance props, CDs, musical instruments) and activities should be available daily. To be considered accessible, children should be able to use the tape/CD player independently.
- **Remember to provide opportunities for dramatic play.** Staff should provide a variety of props which support many roles and situations, and add to the children’s possibilities for dramatic play. For example, if the drama is very active, staff might provide children with a larger space. Or if children need more props, staff might help them find what they need.
- **Be sure all materials for children are age-appropriate.** The age of the children in the group is a key factor in deciding appropriateness. Younger children (K-2) who still may not be able to separate fantasy and reality should have no access to inappropriate books or games. Appropriateness includes content that is not violent, sexually explicit or biased towards any group. For older children, the vast majority of materials should be appropriate, with no materials being extremely inappropriate, for example, graphic depictions of violence and cruelty. Since children will probably not lack exposure to inappropriate materials in other settings, the school age program should concentrate on positive input.