



TIPS FOR USING THE INFANT/TODDLER ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE-REVISED

- **Take time to understand some of the key concepts that impact many items in the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R) and develop a plan to assure your program is aligned with these concepts which include:**
 - **Much of the day:** It means most of the time that any child may be awake and able to play. If children are prevented from using materials for long periods by overly long routines when the children have to wait with nothing to do, being kept in groups that they are not engaged in, or being kept in areas where access is not possible, then credit cannot be given for “much of the day”. If children (or any child) who are ready to play are prevented from reaching and using materials for a total of 20 minutes during an observation, then “much of the day” cannot be given credit. The 20 minutes can be calculated as one 20-minute time period, or as a combination of smaller time periods that equal 20 minutes. Special attention should be paid to individual children who may not have the same access to materials as do other children. For example, non-mobile children or children who are kept in exersaucers, bouncers, high chairs, or cribs may not have the same access to play materials as other children in the group. It is important to set up an environment that allows all children plenty of time to play and explore materials.
 - **Play:** “Play,” or “play activities,” require that children are actively involved, able to use toys or other play materials, and are able to interact with others if they wish. Play activities should not be confused with more passive group times (such as circle times, when children mostly listen to a “teacher” or spend time watching TV or videos) or times when children are required to work on specific non-play tasks, such as coloring alphabet ditto sheets, and are not able to choose to do the activity. Play is characterized by the child being engaged.
 - **Accessible:** Children can reach and are allowed to use toys, materials, furnishings, and/or equipment. Toys in open storage, such as open shelves, must be within easy reach of children. No barriers (verbal, such as a “no-touch” rule, or physical, such as being stored out of sight) can be present to prevent children from reaching them. For example, toys are not accessible if they are in containers with lids that children cannot manage, unless staff show signs of regularly making the toys accessible to children by opening various containers during the observation. If materials are stored out of reach, they must be placed within children’s reach to be counted as accessible. If stored out of a non-mobile child’s reach, the child must be moved to reach the materials, or the materials must be placed close to the non-mobile child, within reach. During the observation, if there is evidence that staff regularly provide access to the variety of toys required for an item or indicator, credit can be given for “accessible.”
- **Don’t forget the babies!** All non-mobile children should have a variety of toys and materials brought to them. It is a good idea to try and limit the amount of time non-mobile children are restricted by being placed in high chairs, bouncers, playpens, etc. The optimal situation is for the staff to be down on the floor with the non-mobile children engaged in conversation, reading books, and showing them a variety of toys and materials.
- **Keep in mind that an outdoor area should be used for active physical play at least one hour daily year-round, weather permitting.** In Illinois, the term “weather permitting” means temperatures between 25 and 90 degrees, taking into consideration the wind chill (e.g., if the temperature was 30 degrees, but 18 degrees with the wind chill, it is not expected that children have outdoor play time). It is said, “There is no bad weather; only bad clothes.” Therefore, children should be dressed properly and taken outdoors on most days. Taking children outside for stroller rides or a nature walk does not count as active physical play.
- **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 fifteen 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.

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 or diapering; 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.

- **Learn how to implement all steps in the diapering procedure outlined on page 25 of the ITERS-R.**
- **Be sure to provide opportunities for all children to understand and use language.** The provider should talk to children frequently throughout the day using language that is meaningful to the children. Be sure to provide opportunities for all children to understand and use language. Talk about many topics and different aspects of experiences, including feelings and the names of objects and actions. Engage in many turn-taking conversations with infants and toddlers, as well as older children, expanding on and adding more words to children's attempts to communicate.
- **Remember to bring books to the non-mobile infants.** Often classrooms have a wide selection of books; however, infants may not have an opportunity to enjoy age-appropriate books. At the minimal level, at least six infant/toddler books (but no less than one for each child in the group) must be accessible daily, for much of the day.
- **Be sure to have sleeping infants within sight of staff.** Supervision of sleeping infants requires that the children are within view of the staff, and visually checked regularly when sleeping; napping toddlers also need to be within sight and hearing of at least one supervising adult.
- **Consider the types of art materials accessible to infants/toddlers.** All art materials used with children must be nontoxic and safe. Glitter is considered an inappropriate art material for infants and toddlers because the sharp particles may cause eye injury if children rub their eyes. Foam pieces, packing "peanuts", and other small items should not be used with very young children because they are choking hazards. If you use shaving cream for art experiences, check the label. Some shaving cream is labeled "Keep out of reach of children" and is not appropriate for use with young children.
- **Consider how you use music and movement with children.** Music materials should be accessible to all children, including the non-mobile child for much of the day. Children should not be required to participate in group music activities; alternative activities should be accessible. Do not have music on throughout the day. When recorded music is used, it must be used at limited times and with a positive purpose.
- **Be sure to have blocks and accessories accessible to children 12 months and older.** Note that interlocking blocks (whether large or small) and very small blocks are considered under Item 16. Fine motor, and are not counted for blocks. See ITERS-R, page 40 for a complete list of appropriate blocks. Accessories include appropriately-sized toys that can be used with blocks to extend block play, such as small vehicles, people, and animals. Accessories must be placed near the blocks so that children know they are meant to be used with blocks.
- **Be aware of potential safety hazards both indoors and outdoors.** Common indoor safety hazards include: uncovered electrical outlets; electrical cords accessible to very young children; heavy objects or furniture children can pull down; and items labeled "Keep out of reach of children" not stored in locked cabinets. For potential safety hazards outdoors, please visit the Environment Rating Scales Website: <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ecers>. Click on ITERS-R, Supplementary Materials, and Playground List to see "Playground Information to Use with the Environment Rating Scales."
- **Consider the types of nature/science experiences set up in your environment.** Children should have some opportunities to experience the natural world daily, either indoors or outdoors. This can occur either by taking children outside to see or experience natural things such as trees, grass, and birds, or by providing experiences with nature indoors, with living plants, an aquarium, or pets.