



TIPS FOR USING THE EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE-REVISED

- **Take time to understand some of the key concepts that impact many items in the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) and develop a plan to assure your program is aligned with these concepts which include:**
 - **Free Play:** Children are permitted to select materials and companions and as far as possible manage play independently. Adult interaction is in response to children's needs. Situations in which children are assigned to centers by staff or staff select the materials that individual children may use do not count as free play. Free play does not mean that all areas of the classroom must be open at one time. However, children must be allowed to choose where they will play, and with whom, from the choices allowed.
 - **Accessible:** Children can reach and are allowed to use toys, materials, furnishings, and/or equipment. For materials to be considered "accessible," they must be within view of younger preschoolers (two and three year olds). For older preschoolers (four and five year olds), 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. For example, if musical instruments are stored in a bin with a closed lid, they would not be considered accessible to younger preschoolers and it would need to be observed that older preschoolers could freely open the lid and access the instruments.
 - **Substantial portion of the day:** It means at least one-third of the time the children are in attendance (operating hours of the center). You can determine your program's substantial portion of the day by using the reference chart in the back of the ECERS-R (score sheet page 12). If children are kept together in whole group activities for long periods, it reduces the likelihood of children having access to materials for a substantial portion of the day.
- **Keep in mind that an outdoor area should be used for gross motor 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 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 on a nature walk does not count as gross motor play.
- **Remember to follow 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.
- **Don't forget to use proper procedures to sanitize the tables.** Tables should be washed to remove gross soil and sanitized with a bleach-water solution before and after being used for meals/snacks. To allow the bleach-water solution to do its job--to kill the germs--it should be allowed to sit for at least 10 seconds before

being wiped dry. If wet clothes are used, a separate cloth is required for each table; cloths cannot be returned to soak in the bleach-water solution.

- ***Become familiar with nap/rest procedures.*** According to Illinois licensing standards, children three years of age and older generally shall not nap more than two hours. At the minimal level, cots must be at least 18 inches apart, unless separated by a solid barrier. At the good level, all cots must be placed at least three feet apart or separated by a solid barrier. And, each child's bedding must be stored separately, so that personal items are not touching those of another child. Children's bedding should not be stored on their cots, touching the bottom and sides of the cot stacked above.
- ***Remember to engage the children in meaningful conversations throughout the day.*** Conversations should be encouraging, informative, and relevant to children. Try to find opportunities to add information to expand on ideas presented by children. According to the ECERS-R, "expand" means staff responds verbally to add more information to what a child says. For example, a child says, "Look at this truck," and the teacher responds, "It's a red dump truck. See it has a place to carry things."
- ***Remember to have a wide selection of books accessible to children.*** A "wide selection of books" includes a variety of topics: fantasy; factual information; stories about people, animals, and nature/science; and books that reflect different cultures and abilities. Make certain there are no books accessible to children that show violence in a graphic or frightening way, or that glorify violence.
- ***Consider how you use music and movement with children.*** There should be enough musical instruments for at least half of the children to use at once plus some music to listen to, such as a tape player with tapes. For a tape or CD player to be considered accessible in a group of older children (majority of children are four years and older), children should be able to use tapes or CDs independently, but in younger groups help may be needed from the teacher.
- ***Don't forget about block play.*** Blocks do not include small blocks (sometimes called table blocks), or any size of plastic interlocking blocks that fit together. Blocks are building materials that do not restrict children by having to fit pieces together in a special way, but challenge children to carefully place and balance materials to create a variety of structures. Block accessories need to be within or near the block area so that it is obvious to the children that those materials are to be used with blocks. Accessories (e.g., small trucks, cars, trains, road signs, small toy people, and small toy animals) enrich block play.
- ***Don't forget dramatic play props.*** Dramatic play materials and furniture should be accessible, so children can act out family roles themselves. At the good level, "many dramatic play materials" means that three or more children can use the materials at one time, without undue competition, and materials are plentiful enough to encourage more complex play. There must be concrete examples of dress-ups associated with being men and women. Thus, two or three gender-specific examples of dress-up items are required (such as ties, hard hats, or shoes to represent men's clothes; purses or flowery hats for women's).
- ***Does your classroom have a cozy area?*** A cozy area is a clearly defined space with a substantial amount of softness where children may lounge, daydream, read, or play quietly. The cozy area must provide a substantial amount of softness for children. This means cozy furnishings must allow a child to completely escape the normal hardness of the typical early childhood classroom. This area must be accessible to children for a substantial portion of the day.
- ***Does your classroom have space for privacy?*** At the good level, space must be set aside for one or two children to play, protected from intrusion by others. Examples of space for privacy are a small loft area or activity centers where use is limited to one or two children. Staff must enforce the protection rule, if needed.
- ***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 ECERS-R, 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.

Adapted from the *Early Child Environment Rating Scale* Revised Edition and *All About the ECERS-R*
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