



## Tips for Using the EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE-REVISED

- **Be sure to provide many opportunities for children to have free play.** *Free play*, according to the ECERS-R, means that children are permitted to select materials and companions and to the extent possible manage their play independently. Situations in which children are assigned to activities by staff or staff select the materials that individual children may use do not count as free play. Activities such as art, fine motor, blocks, dramatic play, books, music, nature and science, and math should be accessible to children for *a substantial portion of the day*. The term *substantial portion of the day* means “at least one-third of the time the center is in session.” If children are kept together in a whole group for long periods of time, it reduces the likelihood that they are able to engage in free play.
- **Be sure that toys and materials are accessible to the children.** *Accessible* means that children can reach and are allowed to use materials, furnishings, and/or equipment. Toys on open shelves must be within easy reach for children. Accessible means there are not verbal barriers such as a “no-touch” rule or physical barriers such as placing toys out of sight to prevent children from reaching them. At a minimal level, toys and materials must be accessible to children for at least one hour daily.
- **An outdoor area should be used daily for one hour for gross motor play, 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. A nature walk does not count as gross motor play.
- **Don’t forget about block play.** 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. At a minimal level, blocks and block accessories (small trucks, cars, trains, road signs, small toy people, and small toy animals) must be accessible to children for at least one hour daily. In the ECERS-R, small table blocks or any size of plastic interlocking blocks that fit together are considered to be fine motor materials.
- **Remember to follow proper handwashing procedures.** According to the ECERS-R, handwashing for children and the staff requires that both hands be washed with liquid soap and rinsed thoroughly under warm running water for at least ten seconds. Hands should be dried with individual paper towels that are not shared. Using gloves, wipes, or antiseptic waterless washes does not count as a substitute for hand washing. Proper handwashing procedures are to be followed upon arrival, before and after meals, after toileting, when re-entering the classroom after outdoor play, before shared water play and after messy sand or water play, after dealing with bodily fluids (running noses, vomit, blood) and after touching pets or contaminated objects (trashcan lids, the floor).
- **Don’t forget to use proper procedures to clean and sanitize tables.** Tables should be washed with a soap/water solution and then sanitized with a bleach-water solution before and after being used for meals and snacks. The bleach-water solution must be allowed to sit for at least ten seconds before being wiped dry. If wet cloths are used, a separate cloth is required for each table, and cloths cannot be returned to soak in the bleach-water solution.
- **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.”
- **Be aware of potential safety hazards both indoors and outdoors.** Common indoor safety hazards include: exposed electrical outlets; strings or cords that might cause strangulation; and heavy objects or furniture that children can pull down. Common outdoor safety hazards include: easy access to the road; unsafe walkway or stairs; and insufficient cushioning in fall zones. The Environment Rating Scales Web site (<http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ecers>) includes a link to “Playground Information to Use with the Environment Rating Scales.”