

Tips for Using the Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised (FCCERS-R)

This tip sheet was created to assist you with some common areas of clarification around the FCCERS-R. Every observation is different, so remember that these are guidelines to support your assessments. Remember to use each item's *Notes for Clarification* section and to look at the ERSI website (<http://ersi.info/>) for updated *Additional Notes* frequently.

- **Take time to understand some of the key concepts that impact many items in the Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised (FCCERS-R)** and develop a plan to ensure 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 were 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 the provider shows 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. It is not necessary to have all materials accessible at the same time. During the observation, if there is evidence that the provider regularly provides 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 provider 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

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.

- **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 family child care homes 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 books but no less than three for each age group enrolled must be accessible daily, for much of the day.
- **Be sure to have sleeping infants within sight of the provider.** The provider must be alert and able to visually supervise infants; toddlers and preschoolers must be heard, and visually checked periodically during nap.
- **Consider the types of art materials accessible to children.** All art materials used with children must be nontoxic and safe. Glitter is considered an inappropriate art material for children less than three years of age because the sharp particles may cause eye injury if children rub their eyes. Foam pieces, packing “peanuts”, and other small items pose a choking hazard for infants, toddlers, and two year olds. If you use shaving cream for art experiences check the back 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 FCCERS-R, page 41 for a complete list of appropriate blocks for each age group. 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 outdoor safety hazards.** For a basic overview of playground guidelines and safety information, please visit the Environment Rating Scales Website: http://www.ersi.info/fccers_supmaterials.html. Click on “playground guidelines.” 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.
- **Limit the amount of time children spend with TV, videos and/or computers.** Since the American Academy of Pediatrics states that children under the age of two should not be allowed to view television, due to persuasive research indicating negative effects for these youngest of children, the age listed in these indicators for the FCCERS-R has changed from 12 to 24 months. In addition, media screen time is limited for children 2 years and older to not more than 30 minutes total, once a week. Computer use time should be limited to no more than 15 minutes per day with the exception of school-aged children completing homework assignments, or children with disabilities who require assistive computer technology. No media screen time should be allowed during meals/snacks.
- **Consider the types of nature/science experiences set up in your environment.** At the minimal level, 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, such as through living plants, and aquarium, or pets.

Adapted from the *Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale Revised Edition*