

Tips for Using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale- 3rd Edition (ECERS-3)

INFORMATION FOR ILLINOIS TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND TRAINERS

Important Notes:

Whether you are new to using the Environment Rating Scales or preparing for a shift to using ECERS-3, it will be helpful for all teachers, administrators, and trainers to read the **entire** yellow ECERS-3 Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale spiral book (Teachers College Press). By becoming familiar with each section of the scale, you will be able to use common language as you talk about and evaluate elements of high-quality within your classrooms.

Please pay close attention to the **Notes for Clarification** section for each item. This book and the notes included will provide needed clarifications for the changes from ECERS-R to ECERS-3. The notes sections provide definitions, details about what must be observed, and other important information.

The **All About Book** (Kaplan Early Learning Company) should be released in fall of 2017. *At that time, all notes on this tip sheet will be replaced by the clarifications the authors present in the All About Book.*

ECERS-3 provides clarified indicators. The content areas were shifted to reflect increased focus on areas of *process quality* that have a direct impact on children's outcomes. These changes include a greater emphasis on **high-quality interactions** in teaching.

For those pursuing a Circle of Quality in ExceleRate Illinois, ECERS-3 will be used to assess classrooms with children ages 3 to 5 years old. It is important to note that if a classroom cares for a combination of two and three year old children, **ECERS-3** will be used if 75% or more of the children are age 3 or older at the time of on-site verification. Otherwise **ITERS-R** will be used to assess the classroom. (For information on ITERS-R, please see the tip sheet at <http://mccormickcenter.nl.edu/tips-for-using-the-infanttoddler-environment-rating-scale-revised/>)

Overall shifts in focus include:

- Greater emphasis on interactions and the teacher's role
- More emphasis on matching teacher interactions with each child's abilities and interests to engage the children.
- More focus on how interactions support learning in teaching activities
- Increased emphasis on pre-academics with new items and indicators in language, literacy, and math
- More emphasis on interactions with materials based on children's abilities
- Adult supervision is incorporated throughout the scales
- Major hazards have been separated into separate indicators

Information related to scoring and content includes:

- Eliminates parents and staff subscale to allow more time to focus on actual classroom practices
- Does away with *substantial portion of day* and replaces with specified time frames for learning activities
- Drops adult-related items that do not relate directly to the classroom
- Relies on direct observation rather than teacher interviews
- Focused on skill level from age three to age five

IMPORTANT ADDITIONS TO NOTE**Language and literacy items added:**

- Helping children to expand vocabulary
- Encouraging children to use language
- Staff engage children in book activities
- Encouraging children's use of books to activate children's interest
- Becoming familiar with print is now required

Science item added:

- Sand/water item added to nature/science

Math items added:

- Math in Daily Events includes not simply having math materials but demonstrating how math is active and connected to the lives and daily activities of the children.
- Understanding Written Numbers includes how staff introduce numbers to children in a meaningful way.
- Math Materials and Activities includes not only access to materials, but how staff use and teach with the materials in a way that engages children's interest and learning.
- Greater focus is placed on the concept of written numbers.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

For the following items, see page 10 of ECERS-3 Scale for full definitions:

- Accessible: All children can reach and use materials, furniture and equipment independently, with no barriers. Also see time requirements in this definition.
- Engaged: Means that children are interested and paying attention. Note the details of this definition.
- Individualized teaching: Involves responding to individual variation in abilities, needs and interests of group. See full definition for specific application.
- Play area and interest area: A space where materials are provided. See full definition for specific application.
- Teaching: Refers to an educational interaction between staff and each child where the interaction provides information and enhances learning and thinking. See full definition for specific application.
- Enough and ample space: See page 14 and 15 for definition and application.

INDIVIDUALIZED TEACHING AND LEARNING

- More emphasis on matching teacher interactions with the child’s abilities and interests to engage the children.
- Teachers engage children’s interests and meaningful learning above and beyond academic skills.
- Interactions happen throughout all routines and activities, including play, to individualize conversation, learning, and interest.
- Teachers intentionally and actively circulate in the classroom and focus personally on each child and individualize verbal interaction and learning supports as a regular part of what they do.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY TIPS (Item 12)

The authors have done an outstanding job of providing very specific examples of language interactions on page 36 and 37. Included are:

- **“Descriptive words”** (Child: “That is a fish.” Teacher: “Yes. That is a slippery yellow sunfish.”)
- **“Wide range of words”** (Child: “I don’t want to.” Teacher: “Yes, I can see you feel disappointed that you can’t read the aquarium book. Would you like to look at the Rainbow Fish book? Those fish scales are turquoise and fuchsia.” (Explanation: Teacher uses “disappointed” instead of sad, and “turquoise and fuchsia” rather than green and pink.)
- **“Unfamiliar words”** (Child: “Why is it cloudy?” Teacher: “The grey mist is called fog. Fog is really tiny bits of water and that is why it feels wet.” (See Pg. 37.)
- **“Introducing new words, concepts, ideas”** (Teacher: “When the baby walrus is sick, who will take care of him? (Responding to a child...) Yes, the zoo-keeper will take the walrus to the veterinarian to evaluate his condition and make sure he is well.”)
- **“Accommodation of words”** (Teacher: “How many ways can you cook an egg for breakfast? We can boil, fry, or scramble the eggs. Podemos hervir, freír o revolver los huevos.” This teacher presents key terms in two languages. She labels items in dramatic play in both English and Spanish. (See pg. 37 for more details.)
- **“Expanding vocabulary/Adding information and ideas”** (Child: “I like trucks.” Teacher: “Yes. Trucks come in many sizes. I have a small pick-up truck. You have seen it in the parking lot. But there are also very big trucks that are used to carry freight. Some of the big trucks even have a place for the driver to sleep in the bed.” (See page 36 notes.)

ENCOURAGING CHILDREN TO USE LANGUAGE TIPS (Item 13)

See page 38 and 39: “Staff are responsive to children when children initiate conversation.” Staff must be in close proximity to children.

- “Conversation” means that there is back-and forth interaction between staff and a child or small group. Please see notes for full description.
- Questions asked by staff include open ended formats where children can explain their ideas, rather than give rote answers or respond with yes and no. Instead of asking, “What shape is this?” – which elicits a single right or wrong answer - the teacher asks, “How do you know this is a square?”

- Higher-level, rich language interactions are intentional and individualized throughout daily routines and play, during gross motor and other activities - not just during teaching/instructional times.
- Teachers are highly responsive to children, keying into what they are doing and saying. Teachers elicit more extended conversation with children as a response to their questions, interests, and activities.
- Conversation between children is actively and purposefully encouraged. (See page 38-39 for details and examples.)

STAFF USE BOOKS WITH CHILDREN TIPS (Item 14)

This section of interaction requires intentional and active teacher support. See page 40 and 41 for full details.

- Children are highly engaged in books that match their interests.
- Teachers model positive emotions and enthusiasm.
- Accommodations are actively provided (individual books, large print, dual language, etc.).
- Teachers encourage children to find and use information in books.
- Books are appropriate for the age and development of children.

ENCOURAGING CHILDREN'S USE OF BOOKS TIPS (Item 15)

This section relates to the categories of books that are available, how the books are arranged and presented, and the nature and quantity of the content. See page 42 and 43 for full details.

BECOMING FAMILIAR WITH PRINT TIPS (Item 16)

This section relates to interactions in the classroom that actively focus on print, including teacher and child engagement, types of visible print, how teachers talk with children about print, how staff record children's words, conversation, and ideas, whether materials are current, and the frequency of attention given to letters, words, print, writing, and word/picture instructions. Page 44 and 45 present detailed information and examples.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES TIPS

Please read all ECERS-3 sections and notes related to fine motor, art, music and movement, blocks, dramatic play, nature/science, math materials and activities, math in daily events, understanding written numbers, promoting acceptance of diversity, and appropriate use of technology. The authors clearly present the requirement for active support of learning through rich conversations, well-planned activities, and responsive interactions. Each section provides detailed examples that show how teachers can be successful in being purposeful, active, and individualized in supporting learning.