



Hints for Boosting Your ERS Score by Improving Quality

Prepared by the Early Childhood Consultants at Child Care Aware® of North Dakota

The Environment Rating Scales are based on observation of daily practice. The scales describe specific things to look for in the early childhood environment, including use of space, personal care routines, interpersonal interactions, language and communication, learning activities, and what is done to support staff and parents.

These indicators of quality incorporate what research has shown to help children develop optimally.

In most cases, licensing regulations are at a minimal level of quality. The scales go beyond licensing requirements to measure good and excellent quality. Here are some things that you may not know about the rating scale requirements.

Health

Please Note: All health and safety requirements are based on the standards set by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Association of Public Health in their book *Caring for Our Children*, 2011 Edition.

- Proper hand washing is the best way to cut down on illness. The children's as well as the caregiver's hands must be washed with soap and running water after diaper changes, before and after eating, and at other times when soiled.
- Hand washing after toileting and before eating should be done in separate sinks. If the same sink is used, the faucets and sink must be disinfected after toileting clean up.
- There must be 3 feet between cots, cribs, and mats for napping, to rate a 5 (good).
- All sand used for outdoor sand play must be clean and covered when not in use, because infants and toddlers tend to put sand in their mouths.

Safety

- All climbing equipment must be surrounded by a fall zone that is at least 6 feet around the equipment and is filled with loose ground cover, at least 6 inches deep. Nine feet between two pieces of stationery equipment is required.
- Loose ground cover (such as pea gravel, shredded bark, or sand) packs down or is carried off and must be replaced to maintain the proper depth. Daily upkeep is also needed to keep the material in places where it is moved away by use (e.g., end of slide, near climbing ladder, under swings).
- Supervision must be very vigilant for infants and toddlers, especially on the playground, because most serious injuries occur from falls.

Language

- Adult talk needs be encouraging, informative, and relevant to children.
- It helps children learn to understand and use language if adults:
 - verbalize about what the child is seeing, experiencing, or doing.
 - encourage children to communicate by being good listeners and conversationalists themselves.
 - sing, read simple stories, and talk about pictures the child sees.
 - use the child's name and make eye contact while talking to them.
- It is not only important for adults to talk to children, but what they talk about is even more important. The most difficult language item in the tool seems to be Using Language to Develop Reasoning Skills. This item requires that adults point out logical concepts when children play with relevant materials, and also ask children to explain their own reasoning about the problems they solve when they use materials. (illustrating concepts such as same/different, serration, etc...)
- Interest and ability in literacy develops as we read to children, write their dictated comments, and provide interesting books for them to look at by themselves.

Learning

- Children need to have access to toys and time to play with the many safe materials offered on the open shelves. These include age appropriate books, art materials, blocks, dramatic play materials, fine motor materials, nature/ science materials, and math materials.

Interaction

- All children need warm, supportive, responsive interactions with adults and other children (this includes infants being held and limiting the use of restrictive equipment.)
- Physical expressions of caring is important-holding, patting, smiling, pleasant voice.
- Crying is real communication and requires a quick and satisfying response.
- Remember that infants and toddlers are people and should be treated as you want to be treated.