



FCCERS-R Assessment Process

Information for FCCH Providers



North Carolina Rated License Assessment Project

In North Carolina, the FCCERS-R (Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale – Revised) has been used to conduct assessments for the Star Rated License since May 2008. Prior to that, beginning in 1999, the FDCRS (Family Day Care Rating Scale) was used. In our system, the FCCERS-R is used in programs that have a family child care license and for small centers in a residence.

The FCCERS-R provides an overview of various aspects of the caregiving and educational environment that are known to be beneficial for young children. It is intended to be used in various types of programs, recognizing that family child care programs are diverse in their operations. For example, some programs use one room for childcare, while others use several. Some programs provide care to one age group, while others have children ranging in age from infants to school-age. The FCCERS-R is not a curriculum or a “prescription” for one specific way to offer family child care; different types of philosophies, priorities, and characteristics (e.g., teaching strategies, interactions, and various content areas) can lead to positive outcomes for children. However, regardless of different characteristics and priorities, all children benefit from being in safe, healthy, and stimulating environments and experiencing positive interactions.

Ultimately, it is the provider’s decision as to how the children’s day will be structured and family child care providers can always make choices regarding the implementation of various content areas within the rating scales based on their individual needs, philosophy, and circumstances. As early childhood professionals, the family child care provider’s role in guiding and supporting children’s development and education is key. Discussions with other professionals such as DCDEE Child Care Consultants, technical assistance professionals, as well as the families served, are helpful in determining whether any modifications should be prioritized based on FCCERS-R requirements and your program’s license.

The FCCERS-R score is calculated based on the average of all item scores; each item is scored independently based on whether requirements of the various indicators are met. It is this overall score that is associated with positive child outcomes, rather than the score on any one item by itself. All programs should expect to have both high scores and some low scores on items. If many items earn high scores, an overall higher average score will be earned. An overall score of 5.0 helps earn the highest possible assessment-related program standards points for licensure. Most importantly, it should be recognized that an overall score of 5.0 provides an indication of the developmental appropriateness of the environment. While many family child care homes earn a score of 5.0 or higher on the FCCERS-R, there are some areas that have consistently been described as challenging or that warrant special consideration for home providers. The following questions have been asked by family childcare providers over the years.

Questions related to the assessment process

Question: How is quality assessed in an objective manner vs. a subjective manner?

Response: The purpose of the assessment is to provide accurate information for all ERS items, based on the observation. NCRLAP strives to ensure that all assessors interpret and apply scale requirements objectively and consistently. This is done by providing a high level of supervision, ongoing training, and monitoring of assessors' work as part of an accurate and fair assessment system. In addition to extensive initial training related to correct interpretation of the rating scales and various assessment procedures, each assessor has ongoing training during regular paired observations with a second observer/trainer. This helps ensure that all staff statewide remain consistent and reliable in using the rating scale. During these paired observations, we verify that assessors score correctly based on observable details of the indicator requirements, rather than personal opinions or reactions. Documentation is required to support scores. Because we realize that mistakes sometimes occur, there is a process that allows providers to question their scores. Information about the grievance process is included on our website, and we encourage discussions with the child care consultant when you have questions or concerns about results.

Question: Why are Family Child Care Homes assessed the same way as single age classrooms in child care centers?

Response: Although some of the same indicators are found in the FCCERS-R and the center-based scales, many of these indicators in the FCCERS-R apply only to certain age groups, require smaller numbers/fewer categories for materials, or apply to different quality levels. There are requirements that are unique to the FCCERS-R and not found in other scales and all requirements in the other rating scales are not in the FCCERS-R.

Family child care homes do not need to look like a child care center, but since children have the same developmental needs, similar types of materials, activities, interactions, and health and safety practices are needed, even though the settings differ. Being aware of the specific requirements for various materials and age groups, and when or where the materials are accessible, is important in understanding how the FCCERS-R is scored. Including children of varying ages is a strength of family child care and a feature that is often distinctive from center-based programs. A mixed age group offers older children an opportunity to be nurturing and experience leadership by helping younger children, while a younger child benefits from having an older child to learn from. When different ages are enrolled, this creates additional considerations related to providing developmentally appropriate materials and interactions for each age group.



Question: How many children need to be present for a valid assessment to occur?

Response: The FCCERS-R assesses group care, and includes indicators that consider interactions between children. For North Carolina's assessment process, an observation cannot be

conducted for programs when fewer than two children are present. More than half of the children currently enrolled, who attend at the time of day the assessment occurs, need to be present for most of the observation (e.g., there are four children who attend on first shift, so three need to be present for the majority of the assessment). If the provider's own children are in care, at least 50% of the enrolled children who do not live at the home must be present for most of the observation.

Question: Do assessors go into all parts of the home?

Response: Assessors consider all parts of the home used for child care. For example, if the main play room is downstairs, but meals are served in the kitchen upstairs, then the kitchen area is assessed. Assessors do not go into parts of the home that are not used for child care. This may be different from what occurs during licensing visits, so please refer to your DCDEE Child Care Consultant regarding their requirements.

Question: Do homes find it difficult financially to prepare for the FCCERS-R assessment?

Response: Play materials are probably the biggest business expense for family providers. The number of materials required by each activity item has been adjusted for family child care homes, with fewer materials being required in some items. However, because developmentally appropriate materials for each age group are required, this can still be a lot of materials. Therefore, it is important to choose materials carefully. Consider that some materials are appropriate for more than one age group; in some cases, the same material may count in different activity items. For example, lacing cards of different geometric shapes can count as a fine motor material as well as a math material for preschoolers. Likewise, puppets that show people of differing abilities can count as a dramatic play prop as well as a material that promotes diversity.



Questions about materials

Question: How can I provide age appropriate materials for one age group while keeping younger children away from these materials that may be potentially unsafe for them?

Response: It is important to be aware that some materials for older children can create choking hazards for children under 3 years of age when there are small pieces. The materials most often noted as choking concerns for younger children are art materials such as small crayons and chalk pieces, googly eyes, and loose marker caps. It is especially

important to monitor the safety of art materials stored within children's reach because this affects the FCCERS-R art item *and* safety item. Crayons often break and the smaller pieces are frequently noted as choking hazards. Chunky toddler crayons and side-walk chalk are sturdier, but can be broken or worn down to a size that is a choking hazard. It is helpful to use a choke tube to regularly test whether accessible objects in children's play areas are too small and need to be removed.



Another common type of small-part choking hazard occurs with science materials, such as small shells, rocks, acorns, magnets, etc. It is possible to provide natural collections and hands-on experiences with materials that are large enough to be safe. Be aware that some sets of other types of toys, such as table blocks, building sets, counting bears, etc., may contain pieces that fit into a choke tube; these pieces should not be accessible to children less than 3 years of age.

When there are school-age children enrolled, many of the materials that are age appropriate for them contain small pieces. Children in this age group can often reach shelves that are too high for children under 3, so storing materials with small pieces out of reach may be possible. Labels and open containers can help ensure that the older children know the materials are intended for their use. It is still important to consider where the materials with smaller pieces are used and how well the pieces are cleaned up, when younger children are enrolled.

Question: Should I have all of my play materials in the play area for the assessor to see on the day of the observation?

Response: The scale has specific requirements for numbers and types of materials for each age group that must be accessible to the children, so being aware of the requirements is important. At the same time, avoiding clutter and crowding, is important in providing a stimulating learning environment. Family child care providers often keep their extra materials in spaces out of the play area, such as a closet or storage area. The assessor will ask about these materials, and where they are stored, but it is not necessary to set them out on the day of the assessment. If there are materials for age groups that are not enrolled at the time of the



assessment, there is no need to have those materials in the play areas. For example, if infants have been enrolled previously in the program, but there are none currently enrolled, having these items in a storage space rather than the play areas provides more room for the children currently enrolled and their play materials. Rotating materials is a way to add or change experiences in different centers and children are often interested in materials that they have not seen in a while. This can help prevent the play areas from being crowded with everything out at once, and maintain children's

interest in materials. When considering what materials to have accessible, remember, it is important to maintain the required number and type of materials for each age group.

Question: Can one material count in more than one item? Or do I need separate materials for each activity item?

Response: There are many materials that can be counted in more than one item. For example, pegs and pegboards with numbers count as a manipulative in the Fine motor item and a material related to number in the Math/number item. Likewise, a book about the weather counts in the Using books item and the Nature/science item; a puzzle showing diverse people is a fine motor item and one that is considered in the Promoting diversity item. The activity items require materials for each age group enrolled. While there are several materials, such as baby dolls, that are appropriate for more than one age group, there are other materials that might be appropriate for younger children, but not older children or vice versa due to the level of

complexity, size, etc. It is important to read each of the item requirements along with the Notes for Clarification to determine if there are enough materials for each age group.

Question: Are there certain authors or book series that I should remove from my home prior to the assessment? For example, are Disney books allowed?

Response: Books that contain violent or frightening images are not considered to be developmentally appropriate. Although some books based on Disney or other popular films contain these types of images, there are also versions of the same stories that do not. To meet the requirement for age appropriate books, any books that contain inappropriate images need to be removed from children's areas.



Question: Are children allowed to watch television or movies while in care?

Response: Depending on the ages of the children enrolled, certain television shows and movies may be beneficial when used appropriately and for short periods of time. The NC Child Care Rules, FCCERS-R and NC Additional notes specify specific time limits for different ages and any type of media use. In addition to the amount of time spent using media, the content of what is being viewed must be considered. Because there are so many programs and movies marketed for young children, resources have been developed to help those caring for children make decisions about what is appropriate for the children they have enrolled. NCRLAP uses Common Sense Media's website (suggested by the American Academy of Pediatrics), to help determine what media is considered inappropriate for children of different ages and what is considered good for children. It is important to consider the age recommendation, the amount of violence, and well as the positive messages and educational value programs have when making decisions about media use.

Question: Can we use food products or empty tissue rolls for projects?

Response: The Notes for Clarification for the Art item (page 39) explain that "Edible materials...cannot be counted as art materials because they give a misleading message about the proper use of food." If they are used, the activity would not earn credit as an art activity. Family child care providers may choose to use food products for various projects, but they will not be considered to meet requirements in the Art item. We have seen appropriate uses of some foods for different activities other than art. For example, tasting different types of apples and then making a chart of children's preferences as a science or math activity. As a side note, handwashing is required before and after any activity when children handle food. The FCCERS-R does not have a rule regarding use of empty tissue rolls. However, DCDEE and/or Environmental Health may address this issue and should be consulted if there are questions.

Questions related to "Much of the day"

Question: Why are there so many items in the scale with a "much of the day" requirement?

Response: Many activity items contain indicators requiring materials to be accessible for "much of the day." This occurs because research shows that free play is the most important way young

children learn. It is during free play that children learn to interact with their peers, make meaningful choices, and use their imagination. It is also when they can choose to learn and play in the way that is most effective for their learning style and personality. When young children follow their own interests, they are more likely to stay engaged and develop needed skills. When there are long periods of time where children's movement is restricted or there are no interesting activities available they can become distracted or bored.

Question: What would prevent me from earning credit for much of the day?

Response: Assessors consider how often experiences with different materials occur, as well as, whether there are any barriers that prevent children from using the required types of materials, except when they are engaged in routines such as eating, toileting, and sleeping. As stated in the Explanation of Terms section of the FCCERS-R (page 10), much of the day requirements are not met if children are prevented from accessing materials for long periods. This can occur when children are required to participate in group activities or they spend time in areas without various types of materials. Some of the more common reasons "much of the day" does not earn credit are long group times and lengthy transitions where children wait as a group for individual routines to be completed. Periods of 20 minutes or longer without materials may prevent indicators that have "much of the day" requirements from earning credit.

Some family child care homes use more than one room during the children's play times. If children spend play times in different spaces, they should have access to the required materials in that space to earn credit for "much of the day." It is important to read the scale text and NC Additional Notes carefully when deciding what materials should be provided in each play space.

Another factor to consider for non-mobile children is that children who cannot move on their own rely on adults to make materials accessible to them. This can be done by moving the children to particular areas of the play area or by moving materials so that they are within reach of the children. It is not expected that a non-mobile child has the number and variety of materials all at once.



However, to earn credit for items that require access to materials or furnishings for "much of the day," it is expected that non-mobile children have regular experiences to a variety of materials during the observation, and that there are no barriers that prevent them from accessing required materials. If required materials are not brought to the non-mobile child during the observation or the child is not taken to the area where they are stored, these materials will not be considered accessible. Frequently, children of this young age are kept in bouncy seats, swings, exersaucers, or something similar. It is important to be aware of how long children stay in these types of seating devices because long periods of time with limited movement or access to various materials can impact items that require access for "much of the day."

Supervision questions

Question: Is it ever okay to leave the children for brief periods of time? For example, if I have to use the restroom.

Response: The terms used in the scale are explained at the beginning of the FCCERS-R book. The section about supervision contains information about times when brief lapses are permitted if children are safe and no problems are observed. Using the restroom is one of the examples given. It is very important to check with your DCDEE Child Care Consultant regarding required supervision practices.

Question: The bathroom is away from my playroom, so when children need to use the restroom I take everyone with me so no one is out of my sight. Will I be penalized for this during my assessment?

Response: Frequently, routine care areas, such as the kitchen and the bathroom, are not located next to the play area. It may not be possible to visually supervise children who are in the play area, while helping other children complete routine care. When the provider cannot see the playroom from the bathroom or kitchen it is common to keep all children gathered together near or in the routine care areas while they are in use. If these times are long or frequent, there should be play activities in these spaces. When the bathroom is down the hall or around the corner from the play area and children wait in the hall with limited or no materials this can affect several items, depending on the amount of time and frequency of transitions. Included is Item 4 Arrangement of indoor space since children's play activities are interrupted during each routine. Likewise, if children are kept in the kitchen during food preparations they should be provided with activities during this time.



The size and design of a space used for transitions will determine whether materials can be stored there or whether a variety of items should be brought along in a bag or storage container during transitions. Scoring is based on a combination of factors including the physical design of the space and accommodations made to the schedule and supervision. Different play activities work well for different groups of children. During transition times, either a choice of activities or a group activity that engages all the children can be offered.

In closing, we would like to acknowledge the many benefits of FCCH environments. Family child care homes and centers in residences often include mixed age groups and siblings can be together. The small group-size allows the children and families to have close relationships with one another that can span many years. Furthermore, the home environment is familiar to young children and may make them feel at ease. A family child care provider may choose to provide flexible hours based on the families of children enrolled and it can be easier to take advantage of community resources, activities, and field trips. Family child care providers are early educators often offering continuity of care across years of young children's lives. They are

able to support individualized, responsive education that builds on previous experiences and current interests. While some FCCERS-R specific requirements may be challenging due to the design of a house, such as a kitchen or bathroom down the hallway, there are many benefits of children being in a home environment and an average high score is still possible.



Want to find out more?

Beyond this information, family child care providers are encouraged to review resources found on the ncrlap.org website. There are videos, video supplements, worksheets, and other information about the NC assessment process and the Environment Rating Scales.

Some specific resource suggestions:

- NC Additional Notes: FCCERS-R
- Summary of Lowest Scoring Items and Indicators for the FCCERS-R
- Language for Learning: Preschoolers
- Language for Learning: Infant/Toddler
- Handwashing and Basic Health Considerations for the Assessment Process
- Stay and Play Outside All Day, parts 1-4
- Thinking More about Learning Materials FCCERS-R worksheet



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Reference: Harms, T., Clifford, R., & Cryer, D. (2007). Family child care environment rating scale. (Revised edition). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.