

# Thinking Ahead: Being Prepared All the Time



Offering quality care to children in your program is an on-going process, regardless of when your assessment window occurs. While the ideas below are not all-encompassing and there are many approaches to continuous quality improvement, these suggestions can help increase understanding of the Environment Rating Scale (ERS) assessment process and ease preparation for your assessment. Please share this information with other program staff to increase understanding of the Environment Rating Scale assessment process throughout your program.

## Read and study the Environment Rating Scale(s)

It is **extremely** helpful for teachers and administrators to spend time reading and studying the Environment Rating Scale(s) carefully, including any definitions in the front of the books. It will also be helpful to take a look at the most recent version of the NC Additional Notes (posted at [ncrlap.org](http://ncrlap.org)) since these include more information about specific requirements for many of the indicators that can help you more fully understand the expectations. Think about how the current arrangements, schedule, materials, and enrollment apply to the various items. Information on how to obtain and study the scale is available at [ncrlap.org](http://ncrlap.org).

## Explore resources to build understanding, general ideas, and address questions at [ncrlap.org](http://ncrlap.org)

To stay informed about any updates and continue to build your understanding of the ERS assessment process, take advantage of the various training resources available at [ncrlap.org](http://ncrlap.org). Encourage all classroom staff in your program to do this as well, and share ideas about what is found. For example, spending a few minutes at regular staff meetings talking about any new ideas or questions about the Environment Rating Scale requirements can help keep the topics current and familiar, while building strong, consistent practices.

- Look for general information about the assessment process and also scale specific resources. For example, there are videos with accompanying supplements, the NC Additional Notes, and many documents and webcasts about different topics. These resources may offer ideas about what to focus on or supplement ideas you were already considering.
- Check out the answers to Frequently Asked Questions or send a new question to [ncrlap@uncg.edu](mailto:ncrlap@uncg.edu)
- Register for free online training webinars. Some are live webinars; others are pre-recorded and offer training credits (contact hours). Call 1-866-362-7527 or register online at [ncrlap.org](http://ncrlap.org) by clicking on "Training" tab and then "Register for an event." Select the event and enter your information. You will receive instructions via email before the event

## Organize a self-assessment

Participate in a self-assessment or self-study process that involves reflection based on the Environment Rating Scales and your current program or classroom environment(s). This can help enhance your program based on developmentally appropriate practices, while becoming more familiar with the Environment Rating Scales and various indicators of high-quality practices. Consider areas in the child care environment that may need enhancement, prioritize these areas, and make decisions about how to modify the environment for quality improvement. Ongoing planning and reflection, with organized documentation allows for greater understanding of which goals were completed, which ones need to be further adjusted, or simply need continued attention to build consistency.

- Has your program been assessed in the past? Your previous assessment report(s) can be a helpful starting point for planning and reflection. Make sure to consider your current arrangements, schedule, materials, and enrollment. Pay attention to the previous high and low scores to fully understand what may have changed since the previous assessment as you review and plan.

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- Study one or more of the ERS further and conduct a self-assessment using the scale and a scoresheet that can be found at the end of the scale. To assign scores, objectively determine whether the requirements of the indicators are present in your program. Remember to give credit only for what is observed that day, even if you know at other times practices might be different. After scoring, make plans based on what you noticed. It may be beneficial to focus on a subscale (section) for a few weeks, before moving on to the next subscale, until the entire scale has been studied. Alternately, you may decide to go more in-depth with a specific subscale or selected items for the duration of your self-study.
- Think about the types of questions that are asked in the teacher interview. You can find the most common ones following each item in the rating scale. Questions are also asked about the daily schedule and what children experience, from the time the program opens until it closes. Practice with the interview questions can be helpful in reflecting on current situations and may also help teachers feel more informed about the interview process.
- Program administrators may want to observe in each classroom using the Environment Rating Scales, to offer tips and support, and be aware of how various program policies and goals are being carried out. Ideally this will also include discussion between teachers and administrators to build a shared understanding and lead to continuous quality improvement.
- Use the findings of a self-assessment to make positive changes, making sure that the changes reflect best practices for young children and improve the quality of the program on an ongoing basis.

## **Allow time for staff and children to adjust to change**

If you are planning to implement quality improvements/changes to classrooms, make sure to do this well before your scheduling window to allow teachers and children time to adjust. This gives time to evaluate the effectiveness of the changes. For example, a change to the daily schedule, incorporating new materials, changing the room arrangement may be a good idea; however, these new ideas may create other challenges that need to be worked out. Therefore, allow time for the enhancement process to be successful before the day of the assessment.

## **Consider opportunities to increase communication across your program**

Reflect on communication across the program. Identify areas for improvement with your staff. For example, what built-in opportunities exist for afternoon teachers to communicate critical information with morning teachers? Are all staff familiar with important program policies such as “weather permitting” or protocols for sick children? Use staff meeting time to talk about concerns, questions, or new ideas.

## **Use community resources**

Get help and ideas for continuous quality improvement from local TA resources at the CCR&R or Smart Start Partnership in your area. Keep your eyes open for workshops on various early childhood topics; these will often spark new ideas and may provide inspiration to your program. The ERS are broad and include many topic areas, so it is likely there is a way to connect your interests or those of the children and families into your ongoing quality enhancement efforts. While working with staff to make adjustments, discuss these with your local Technical Assistance Specialists and/or your Child Care Consultant. This will help you feel ready when it is time for your Child Care Consultant to submit your request for an assessment to NCRLAP.