



CREATING A QUALITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

About the Assessment Process in NC

Use this video supplement to learn more about the process of having an assessment completed by the North Carolina Rated License Assessment Project.

Using the Supplement Guide for the Video “About the Assessment Process in NC”

Child care centers, family child care providers, and agencies that offer assistance to child care facilities can use this information to supplement the content discussed in the video. Much of the guide follows the outline of the video, but additional information and examples are provided in this format.

We encourage child care providers who have never been assessed for licensure to consider this opportunity to gain an objective view about the quality of care they provide in their programs and use that information to make decisions about quality improvements. Contact your Child Care Consultant at the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education for more information about the assessment process, star rated license system, and submitting a request for an assessment. Thank you for viewing the video. We hope the information shared with you generates new ideas to consider for your program.

Considerations While Viewing this Video and Others in the Series “Creating a Quality Learning Environment”

As the audience watches the video, they may have many ideas and thoughts to consider. It is important to remember that each video in the series has a particular area of focus. Though viewers might want to consider all the factors that contribute to a quality child care program, we recommend keeping the specific content in mind while watching, so you can pay attention to the key considerations of the focus area. For example, one video focuses primarily on sanitation; even though there may be scenes of positive interactions between staff and children, the main discussion points surround handwashing and basic sanitation. Furthermore, viewers may notice elements that may seem problematic for meeting various requirements across different agencies. Some may even point out an issue or concern, or disagree with how a situation is handled. Acknowledging the fact that no child care program offers “perfect care” and the goal of this series is to show quality across a variety of settings, rather than depicting an ideal or unobtainable standard, may help address these concerns.



About the Assessment Process in NC

The purpose of this video is to orient child care programs to rated license assessments in North Carolina so they will know what to expect when participating in the process. The video depicts each step of the process and allows programs to see what a classroom observation is like. This guide is organized to follow the chronological timeline of the process from start to finish.

The assessment process is designed as a way for programs to receive objective feedback about the child care environment, and programs can use the time before the assessments and after receiving the facility summary report as a way to enhance program quality. It is important to note that even though assessments occur every three years, program preparation and quality improvement efforts should be an ongoing process. It takes time to change practices and behaviors as well as time to evaluate the effectiveness of any modifications.

Outline of Video Supplement Content

- I. Preparing for an Assessment
- II. Requesting an Assessment
- III. Scheduling
- IV. The Observation(s)
- V. Facility Summary Report Review
- VI. Commonly Asked Questions
- VII. Review Questions
- VIII. Resources

I. Preparing for an Assessment

Helpful information can be found on the NCRLAP's Web site, www.ncrlap.org, including the brochures, "A Quick Reference to the Rated License Assessment Process" and "Your Assessments Are Scheduled, Now What?" Many programs find it useful to spend time before the assessment process identifying program strengths and areas needing improvement. Often, programs will seek resources such as a meeting with their Child Care Consultant to discuss ways the program can enhance quality. Programs may also want to contact a Technical Assistant from a local Resource and Referral or Smart Start Partnership. Some child care staff can find it useful to conduct self-assessments using our Thinking More About worksheets, attend trainings and seminars, as well as attend college classes to further their understanding of child development and offering quality child care. It is critical that the caregivers in the program have access to the appropriate Rating Scale during preparations, along with a current set of NC Additional Notes, which can be found on our website.

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II. Requesting an Assessment

Once a program has determined that it is ready for an initial assessment or it is time for the program's three-year license renewal, the program can begin the application process. The first step is contacting a Child Care Consultant. Information about how to do this is on the Division of Child Development's Web site. It is the facility's consultant who sends in the request to NCRLAP's office.

III. Scheduling

After the request is received, a scheduler from the NCRLAP office will contact the program to set the scheduling window, briefly explain the process, and send an information packet to the program. Programs should consider any special or unusual events taking place during their scheduling window in order to set block-out dates. When the packet arrives, the required paperwork should be completed and classroom schedules printed out prior to the first day of the scheduling window.

IV. The Observation(s)

The assessor or assessors arrive for the observation(s) on a nonblock-out date within the scheduling window. The observation is completed as is described in the video. When more than one assessment is needed in a facility, the assessments may take place on the same day, or they may be on different days. Sometimes one assessor will complete an observation, while other times two assessors complete a single observation together. Teachers and administrators should feel free to share any information they think the assessor needs to know about the program, classroom, or specific children.

V. Facility Summary Report review

Once all the needed observations have been completed and assessment reports have been written and finalized, a facility summary report is sent to the program's Child Care Consultant. The consultant then contacts the program and arranges to review the report with the facility's administrators.

While reviewing assessment reports, it is important to remember that participating in the assessment process allows child care centers and family child care homes to receive detailed feedback about their programs. This feedback can be used to inform the development of long-range goals and to implement a quality improvement plan. It is important to understand that it is the overall average score on the assessment report that indicates the quality level, rather than the score for individual items. It is likely that most programs will receive some high and



also some low scores on at least a few of the individual items.

Classroom staff, home providers, and program directors are encouraged to use the information in the reports to help identify areas where simple changes can enhance quality as well as considering some areas that will require more time and consideration to make improvements. Some programs may also have a situations related to the physical space, a specific or unique program philosophy, or financial limitations that may hinder getting higher scores on some items. Again, it is important to remember that high scores in one area can balance lower scores in another area, and it is the overall average score that is used for licensing purposes to reflect program quality.

The Child Care Consultant is the first person to contact if questions arise regarding the assessment. Questions may be addressed during the report review or afterwards. If needed, the consultant can contact NCRLAP for more information.

VI. Commonly Asked Questions about the Assessment Process

What is a “typical” day?

Because the Environment Rating Scales are primarily observation-based tools intended to reflect children’s daily experiences, it is important that the assessment occurs on a typical day. Therefore, the events occurring during an assessment should represent typical practices and routines in a classroom. Special events such as field trips, special programs or visitors, or parties should be taken into consideration when block-out dates are set.

Normal staffing patterns should be maintained during observations. If a floater typically helps in a classroom at a set time, he or she should do so, even during an assessment. This procedure is also true for therapists who come to the facility to work with children in the classroom setting. Their participation should occur as normally scheduled. Be aware that the use of additional staff in a classroom, when they do not typically work in that classroom, can affect the assessment in negative ways. For example, a program may want to provide additional support for the teachers during an assessment by sending a teacher from another classroom to help; however, having an extra adult who is not as familiar with the daily routines can add additional stress, result in incorrect practices, and also prevent accurate information from being obtained about the classroom’s typical events. Assessors are required to ask specific questions about each staff person’s role in the classroom.



What if I realize I need to change my block-out dates?

After the scheduling window is determined, it is important to remember that assessors may arrive on any day that is not blocked out. Therefore, it is recommended that programs avoid adding special events during this time frame once the dates have been identified.

However, sometimes an upcoming special activity date is changed or a program learns of a new opportunity for a resource activity after the scheduling call has been made, or a lead teacher requests time off. Before your scheduling window begins, contact the NCRLAP schedulers to see if these situations would impact the assessment and let NCRLAP know which date may need to be changed. Changes can be made in block-out dates until the confirmation call is made, just prior to the assessment window beginning. Changes made to block-out dates after the start of the scheduling window should be confirmed with your Child Care Consultant.

What happens if an issue arises with a classroom on the morning of the assessment?

First, explain the issue to the assessor, before random selection begins. All classrooms, regardless of circumstance, will be included in random selection. However, if the classroom that had the concern is selected, let the assessor know and he or she can determine if the observation can take place or not. If the assessor determines that the classroom cannot be assessed based on requirements for a valid assessment, he or she can reselect from the remaining classrooms; in some situations, the assessment will need to be rescheduled for a different day.

Why do assessors sometimes leave the group they are assessing?

There are times when the assessor leaves the group being observed. This can happen because the group is out of the classroom, for example, when children are playing outdoors and the assessor wishes to document some information about the classroom without disrupting play activities. In this case, before leaving the group, the assessor first documents information about the outdoor space, including the equipment and materials, activities, and interactions. When the assessor has collected all of the information, he or she needs about the outdoor environment, the assessor may then use some of the time the children are outside to photograph materials and the classroom layout.

Also, just as teachers need breaks during their work day, assessors may also step away from the classroom for a quick break at an appropriate time that will not interfere with the assessment process.



What if I have questions or don't agree with my scores?

Your Child Care Consultant can help answer questions or follow up with the assessor or other NCRLAP staff if necessary. Many times issues that seem to be confusing can be clarified with a quick phone call to the NCRLAP office as you and your consultant review an assessment report. Remember that since your consultant was not present during the observation, the additional information will be helpful to him or her as well. There is also a grievance process for providers who do not agree with their scores. It is important to NCRLAP staff that programs receive the most accurate scores and also that the assessment information is used to make positive changes for children; therefore, NCRLAP is glad to correct any errors that are found or to answer questions about scoring requirements or assessment results. As part of this process, the scores and assessment report are reviewed, any needed corrections made, and a response letter is written. The response letter provides additional information about the specific indicator requirement questioned and how these apply to the observation. Details about the grievance process are located on the NCRLAP Web site under "resources" and are also included at the end of the facility summary report.

VII. Review Questions

There are no specific answers to these questions, since the answers depend greatly on individual program philosophies, values, and goals.

- How is the assessment process valuable for your individual classroom and/or child care facility?
- How might you use the information in your facility summary report or individual classroom assessment report for quality improvement?
- Do you believe the assessment process is important to child care in North Carolina? If so why?
- How is this process important to the families who seek child care in our state?

VIII. Resources

Helpful documents and related resources are found:

Web Resources

- Child Care Resources, Inc.: www.childcareresourcesinc.org
- Child Care Services Association: www.childcareservices.org
- NC Pre-K: http://ncchildcare.dhhs.state.nc.us/general/mb_ncprek.asp
- North Carolina Association for the Education of Young Children: www.ncaeyc.org
- North Carolina Child Care Health and Safety Resource Center: www.healthychildcarenc.org
- North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education: www.ncchildcare.dhhs.state.nc.us
- North Carolina Rated License Assessment Project: www.ncrlap.org
- Smart Start Partnerships for children: www.ncsmartstart.org
- Southwestern Child Development Commission: www.swcdcinc.org

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Acknowledgments

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