

Thinking More about Program Structure



ECERS-R

Purpose: This document addresses many of the requirements found in the Program Structure subscale. The focus is primarily on indicators found at the 3, 5, and 7 level. It is important to review each item entirely to ensure that no indicator at the 1 or “inadequate” level applies to the classroom. Answering the questions and referring to the ECERS-R will build familiarity with requirements, while offering a chance to reflect on current practices and situations.

Preparation: Refer to the ECERS-R (spiral bound edition published in 2005) when completing the questions. To better understand the scale format and structure, review the instructions for scoring on pages 5-6 in the ECERS-R and the definitions of common terms on pages 6-7. It will also be helpful to refer to a copy of the most current NC Additional Notes (available at ncrlap.org). There are many questions, so completing them all will likely take several reflection/review sessions.

The items included consider many aspects related to maintaining awareness about how the classroom structure contributes to children’s opportunities to explore, learn, and become increasingly independent. There is a focus on the ways classroom structure creates a predictable sequence of events that include regular routines, significant opportunities for complex play, smooth transitions, ample time for interactions with adults and peers, responsive group activities, and inclusion of children with disabilities. These aspects provide a strong foundation for fun and enriching experiences, and strong relationships.

Tips:

- If you are confused about a question in the worksheet, look at the item in the ECERS-R and any notes to identify the specific indicator and requirement to which it refers.
- Describe the current and actual practices that occur when answering the questions. Remember, this is not about a “right answer” but rather a way to build understanding about what occurs every day. In the reflection section at the end, it can be helpful to add ideas about future plans or changes.
- Using the worksheet on an ongoing basis can help verify that the classroom structure is supportive and developmentally appropriate. This process also emphasizes how specific aspects of program structure support the teachers in providing experiences that are positive and enriching.
- Answering the questions with someone else (co-teachers, administrators, technical assistance specialists, etc.) promotes sharing of perspectives and may draw attention to different details.

Date(s) completed: _____ Classroom name/age group: _____

Worksheet completed by: _____

ITEM 34 Schedule (p. 63)

Do children experience a familiar daily schedule? **Y / N**

Is there a written schedule posted in the classroom? **Y / N**

Does play occur for at least one hour indoors every day? **Y / N**

Does play occur for at least one hour outdoors, every day, weather permitting? **Y / N** (Hint: See Terms Used Throughout the Scale on page 7 of the ECERS-R for a definition of “weather permitting” and/or refer to the Child Care Weather Watch Chart at ncrlap.org).

What conditions prevent outdoor play from occurring?

Who is involved in making decisions about when outdoor play will occur and how are decisions made?

Is there active gross motor play every day, including indoors when weather prevents outdoor play? **Y / N**

Does the daily schedule include both teacher-led and child-initiated play activities? **Y / N** If **yes**, give a few examples of each type of play.

Teacher-led:

Child-initiated:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

What is the total amount of time that some type of play occurs each day? _____

Is this at least one-third of the program’s operating hours? **Y / N**

What is done to reduce waiting or keep children engaged during transitions?

Does this prevent transitions where children must wait for more than 3 minutes at a time without activities? **Y / N** If **no**, what other strategies could be helpful?

Is there any flexibility in the schedule? When and what does this look like?

Is the schedule ever adapted to accommodate a child's individual needs? **Y / N** If **yes**, give a few examples of when this is mostly like to occur:

ITEM 35 Free Play (p. 64)

Hint: Only times when children can choose both the materials they use and peers to interact with, are considered free play.

Does free play occur indoors each day? **Y / N**

Does free play occur outdoors each day, weather permitting? **Y / N**

How long does free play last indoors? _____ Outdoors? _____

When combined, are these times at least one-third of the program's daily operating hours? **Y / N**

During free play times both indoors and outdoors, consider the supervision that occurs. Does it (check all that apply):

- Protect children's health and safety?
- Facilitate children's play by helping with use of materials, offering additional materials to support their play, etc.?
- Provide educational interactions related to their play such as problem solving, adding information and new ideas, encouraging children to talk more about their activities?

During times children are playing, are there many types of materials and equipment for them to use? **Y / N**

Is this true for both indoor and outdoor materials and equipment? **Y / N**

Are all classroom centers or areas of the playground always open during play times? **Y / N** If **no**, for what reason are they closed and for how long?

Are there play and learning materials to rotate or add during free play times? **Y / N**

How often is something added or rotated? _____

Do any of the new/rotated materials relate to the current topics of interest or classroom themes?

Y / N If **yes**, give some examples: _____

ITEM 36 Group Time (p. 65)

Hint: This item considers large and small group teacher-directed activities, self-selected small group play, individual play, and routine care.

List the times and lengths of typical whole-group or circle time activities:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

What types of activities or topics are used during group times? _____

Is the length of group time based on children's interest and engagement? **Y / N** If children are not interested, how is this handled? _____

Are there plans for individual and small group play times each day, in addition to planned large group times? **Y / N**

Regarding play activities, are these primarily done individually or with small groups? **Y / N**

Do children generally choose who they want to play with? **Y / N**

Are there educational interactions with children as they play individually or in small groups? **Y / N**

Does routine care occur in small groups or individually, or some of both? _____

Throughout the day, is there variety in the types of activities and groupings offered to children to help provide a change of pace? **Y / N**

ITEM 37 Provisions for children with disabilities (p. 66)

Only complete the questions in this section if there is a child with a diagnosed disability and completed assessment or if there is a child receiving services, such as speech therapy. If there are multiple children with special needs, respond to the questions keeping each child in mind.

Do teachers have information from/about each child's assessment(s)? **Y / N**

Is each child able to fully participate in the classroom experiences? **Y / N**

Describe anything special teachers do to help each child participate:

If professionals recommend specific activities or experiences for the child, do teachers implement these?

Y / N If **yes**, describe:

Do parents and staff exchange information about a child's special needs? **Y / N** If **yes**, what topics are discussed?

Are parents and teachers involved in joint goal setting for the child's classroom experiences? **Y / N**

How often does communication with parents occur informally and how is this done?

Are meetings also scheduled to discuss progress, feedback, goals, etc.? **Y / N** If **yes** how often do these occur?

Where does therapy occur?

Do teachers contribute to assessments or intervention plans, or attend IEP meetings? **Y / N**

Reflection for future planning: After completing this worksheet, it can be helpful to go back and think about the answers. Were there any questions that were answered no instead of yes? Are there any specific areas where improvements could be made? Use the space below to reflect on your answers and list any plans or ideas related to making positive changes.
