

Outdoor Environments and the Third Editions of the Environment Rating Scales (ECERS-3, ITERS-3, FCCERS-3)



Is NCRLAP still promoting the use of outdoor environments and bringing different types of materials outside?

Yes, outdoor learning is really good for children's development. Over the years, programs in our state have developed many interesting outdoor environments, along with creative ways to enhance and extend activities outside. We want all of that to continue, even though there are newer rating scales with some different assessment procedures and scoring requirements. The best way to continue to promote outdoor learning is to become familiar with the requirements and to be clear on what has changed. This way, we can all work together to think creatively about continuing to support quality outdoor learning environments and activities even though there are several differences between the newer versions and the Revised Editions of the Rating Scales we used previously.

Do outdoor materials still count positively for program's scores?

If all the requirements in a specific indicator are met in the outdoor environment **and** outdoor play is observed, those materials will count. It is important to be aware that there is a new definition for interest centers and some of the items in the Activities subscale such as Dramatic play, Blocks, and Nature/science require not only materials, but an actual interest center. Pay careful attention to the definitions and indicator requirements to be sure about which materials and areas can be counted.

What happens if outdoor play does not occur during the assessment?

Since the Third Editions are based entirely on a 3-hour observation, if outdoor play does not occur, then the materials outside cannot be considered. Instead, the indoor materials and centers are what will be reflected when scoring. Assessors will visit the outdoor space even if the children do not go outside primarily to consider safety.

How much time is required for outdoor play in the Third Editions?

Each of the Third Editions requires at least 30 minutes of outdoor time to be observed during the 3-hour observation period, weather permitting. The definition of weather permitting has not changed. The ECERS-3 also requires at least 30 minutes for children to use gross motor equipment that stimulates many different skills, and this applies indoors, if outdoor play is not possible. But it is very important to remember that the Third Editions are based entirely on a 3-hour observation. So, these time requirements do not represent how much outdoor time is good for children across their entire day at a program. Additional outdoor time and gross motor activity is always beneficial.

Does the information from NCRLAP's Stay Outside and Play All Day training/resource still apply?

The value of outdoor play absolutely still applies, there are simply some different procedures and requirements for the newer scales that need to be understood for programs to receive the maximum benefits during their assessments. This training/resource will be updated to include details specific to the Third Editions.