



NC ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR THE FCCERS-3

The NC Additional Notes provide supplementary information for the Environment Rating Scales so that participants in the assessment portion of the North Carolina star rated license may correctly interpret and score items found within the scale. A primary aim for the notes is to further explain the requirements of certain items to improve interrater reliability or consistency among assessors working with the North Carolina Rated License Assessment Project (NCRLAP).

The NC Additional Notes are developed by members of the NCRLAP's management team, especially by our state anchors. These notes include some of the Additional Notes posted at [ersinstitute.com/additional notes](https://ersinstitute.com/additional-notes) which are indicated with a parenthetical reference. However, the Environment Rating Scale Institute (ERSI) addresses questions from many different states and systems. Therefore, we include only the notes that will be helpful to participants in North Carolina's assessment process because of the relevancy to situations in this state, along with other specific details based on NCRLAP's assessment work and the NC Child Care and Sanitation Rules.

Participants in the NC star rated license system should be aware of the following:

- The NC Additional Notes are updated (approximately) every 6 months, as needed. NCRLAP assessors conduct assessments using the most current notes. The most current notes are available at ncrlap.org.
- NCRLAP assessors use only the NC Additional Notes for the FCCERS-3 and, due to modifications and additions that occur over time, the NC Additional Notes differ from notes found on the Environment Rating Scales Institute website. Participants in the NC star rated license should replace older notes with the current NC Additional Notes.
- NCRLAP began using the Third Edition of the FCCERS on February 1, 2025, and assessors use the reprinted version that includes the Updated Notes for Clarification in the scale text. For assessment purposes, this version replaces the FCCERS-R.

Recent changes (The most recent changes are italicized in this document): *Minor updates 7/20/2026; Item 20 4/11/2025*

GENERAL NOTES FOR THE FCCERS-3

Ages: When "older children" are mentioned, this applies to children 3 years and older.

Handwashing: In certain situations, when a sink with running water is not accessible for the group to use, hand sanitizing products may be used in lieu of handwashing. For example, hand sanitizer may be used while staff supervise children outdoors if hands are washed upon returning indoors. The following requirements must be met; the waterless wash or wipe must be used according to manufacturer guidelines (i.e., labeled as safe for use by children, used only with adult supervision, allowed to dry properly), and the waterless wash must be stored out of reach of children. Please note that this substitution is only acceptable in certain circumstances and that the requirements for adequate handwashing still apply for routine care activities and general classroom use. NCRLAP requires washing with soap and water whenever handwashing is needed indoors.

Proper hand washing for adults and children: Includes use of running water and soap for approximately 15-20 seconds, followed by drying with an individual paper towel or air dryer. Since children develop head and body control at individual rates, observers cannot use a chronological age to

determine whether handwashing is required for young infants and older children with disabilities. If children can hold their own heads steadily upright while sitting or being held by a caregiver, then handwashing is required.

Poor repair: Materials and books that are in poor repair, meaning that they are not usable as intended, are excluded when determining whether the required numbers or examples for various categories have been provided.

Sanitation: Although for licensure, a Family Child Care Home is not required to meet the sanitation requirements contained in 15A NCAC 18A .2800 of the Sanitation of Child Care Center Requirements, operators should be aware that NCRLAP assessors use the following information for all assessments related to sanitizing solutions and disinfectants when conducting a FCCERS-3 assessment:

- For chlorine bleach and water sanitizing solution to be effective, it must be mixed to the strength specified in 15A NCAC 18A .2801 Definitions (22) and be allowed to dry for a minimum of 2 minutes. Complete air drying is ideal. Other sanitizing solutions, approved in 15A NCAC 18A .2812, Cleaning and Sanitizing Equipment and Utensils (5E) may also be used.
- For chlorine bleach and water disinfecting solution to be effective, it must be mixed to the strength specified in 15A NCAC 18A .2801 Definitions (7) and be allowed to dry for a minimum of 2 minutes. Complete air drying is ideal. Other EPA registered disinfectants or germicides may be used, based on the specifications found in the same definition (e.g., approved for equivalent setting and instructions for use are followed).

Gross motor equipment and safety issues: NC assessors use the gross motor safety information sheet titled: “NCRLAP’s Requirements for Gross Motor Space and Equipment.” This document is available at ncrlap.org.

General references: Materials that are frequently used by NCRLAP to assist in decision making are Caring For Our Children (used for health, sanitation, and safety issues) and the Handbook for Public Playground Safety, CPSC Publication No. 325 (for gross motor play issues), and ASTM 2373 Standard Consumer Safety Specification for Public Use Play Equipment for Children 6 Months through 23 Months. Links to these resources are found on our website ncrlap.org and providers are encouraged to access these; however, all information contained in these resources may not be applied during an assessment.

ITEM 1:

Indicator 3.2: If a home has windows with dark shades or blinds on all windows that are closed throughout the observation, credit is not given since children do not experience natural light (ERSI, 2024).

ITEM 2:

Indicator 5.1: Most of the NFC on page 18 for 1.1 and 3.1 also applies to indicator 5.1 (ERSI, 2024). Preschoolers and older children need easy access to their storage space; however, this is addressed in indicator 5.3, which considers accessibility and convenience.

Indicator 3.1 and 5.1: If a smaller diapering table or other diapering surface is used, but it is not long and/or wide enough to accommodate the child’s whole body, give credit for 3.1 but not for 5.1 (ERSI, 2024).

Indicator 5.2, 7.1: Child sized tables/chairs are not required for either of these indicators. For Indicator 5.2, credit can be given even if the tables/chairs must be adapted in some way to the children’s size, for example, adult furniture is used with booster seats (ERSI, 2024).

Indicator 5.4: Several means at least two areas (ERSI, 2024).

ITEM 4:

Indicator 7.3: More than 1 example is required (ERSI, 2024).

ITEM 5:

Indicator 1.2, 3.1, 5.2

- When deciding whether foods observed being served at meals may be choking hazards, consider all foods offered. To score 1.2 Yes, most foods must be inappropriate, with many problems. For 3.1, generally appropriate means there may be a minor problem observed, but the children are not observed being affected. For example, there may be a food that might cause choking, but children eat the food with no problems. To score 5.2 Yes, there can be no safety issues with the appropriateness of the food (ERSI, 2024).
- Portions of each required food component must be placed on each child's plate unless meals or parts of meals are served family style, in which case enough of the food served family-style must be available for all children to serve themselves required amounts. Verbally offering a food or beverage that is not within reach of a child is not sufficient.
- NCRLAP does not evaluate the nutritional adequacy of foods or beverages brought from a child's home; however, for meals and snacks provided by the family child care program, nutrition guidelines still apply. Therefore, for NC assessments, do not apply the second and third sentences of the NFC for 1.2, 3.2, and 5.2 on page 24 of the FCCERS-3.
- Written instructions from a child's health care professional for food or beverage substitutions are acceptable. For snacks: Two of four nutritional components from the USDA Meal Guidelines must be served. A child with food or beverage allergies may be served any food that counts for a second USDA component as a substitute. For example, if the snack is milk and crackers, a child who is allergic to milk may be served juice and crackers because the child's allergies are considered, and the alternative snack still meets USDA guidelines. A food or beverage substitution must be made in cases when there is a family dietary preference or restriction, and the substitution must meet USDA guidelines.

Indicator 1.3, 3.3, 5.3:

- Sanitary eating surfaces must be cleaned with a soapy water solution, wiped dry, and then sprayed with the sanitizing solution before and after eating. Paper towels or a clean cloth, rather than sponges, should be used. The same cloth or paper towel cannot be used to wipe the soapy water and the sanitizing solution. The use of a clean cloth to wipe sanitizing solution from more than one table is acceptable if the sanitizing procedure was carried out correctly.
- If a table itself cannot be sanitized, then a placemat (e.g. vinyl) that is cleaned and sanitized may be used or a clean disposable placemat may be used.

Indicator 3.4 To score No, an extremely negative interaction, or many mildly negative interactions must be observed (ERSI, 2024).

ITEM 6:

For proper sanitary diaper change procedure, see the NC Health and Safety Resource Center Diapering Procedure Poster available at <https://healthychildcare.unc.edu/resources/posters/>

Indicator 1.1, 3.1, 5.1, 7.1: New information from CFOC shows that touching sink faucets after handwashing does not add to a substantial amount of contamination. Therefore, it is no longer required that faucets be turned off with a paper towel. In addition, if sinks are observed to be used for multiple purposes, and only the faucets are touched during handwashing (e.g., no food washed in sink, no touching sink surfaces occurs), it is no longer necessary

to disinfect the sinks between different uses, except when soiled or during regular cleaning. Therefore, if a shared sink is used without disinfecting, consider the relative contamination that is observed, and if minimal, consider this a minor problem when scoring the handwashing/sanitation indicators (ERSI, 2024).

Indicator 3.2, 5.2: When the toilet is clearly freely accessible to preschool children, it is not necessary to observe a toileting routine unless there are accidents or instances of staff ignoring children's cues or requests.

Indicator 3.4: To score No, an extremely negative interaction, or many mildly negative interactions must be observed (ERSI, 2024).

ITEM 7:

Indicator 1.2, 3.2, 5.2, 7.1: The categories of handwashing considered in these indicators include 1) after arriving and re-entering a classroom following outdoor play, 2) before and after using shared wet materials such as water or playdough, 3) after playing with sensory materials or other messy materials (e.g., sand, many art materials), 4) after having contact with bodily fluids, and 5) after touching contaminated objects of any type.

Indicator 3.3, 5.3: Adequate spacing between cots/mats/cribs or a solid barrier between nap provisions is acceptable for NC assessments. The solid barrier must extend the entire length of the sleep surfaces. Children should not sleep directly on a bare surface. A clean sheet, blanket, or equivalent that covers the entire sleeping surface must be provided for each child.

ITEM 8:

Indicator 1.1, 3.1, 5.1, 7.1: NCRLAP relies on the updated information found in the on-line version of Caring For Our Children standard 3.1.4.1 to define safe sleep practices. Therefore, no items other than the child and his/her pacifier should be in a crib that is in use. This applies to bedding such as flat sheets, blankets, etc. Refer to <http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/3.1.4.1> for more information.

Item 13:

Indicator 5.1: This indicator requires that the provider reads a complete book, unless the child(ren) clearly lose interest before the book is finished. The observed book reading should be long enough to be a meaningful and engaging experience for child(ren) to be counted. Singing the text of a book can count as "reading aloud." In addition, reading picture labels in picture-word books can be counted as "reading aloud" to infants and toddlers. (ERSI 2024)

ITEM 14:

Indicator 5.3, 7.2: NA permitted applies only to infants who are unable to sit unsupported (ERSI, 2024).

ITEM 15:

Indicator 1.3, 3.3: If materials are accessible but children do not choose to use them, then the provider must be observed encouraging their use at least once to score 1.3 No and 3.3 Yes (ERSI, 2024).

ITEM 17:

Indicator 1.2: Change the word "day" to "observation" in the indicator text (This portion of the note is for first printing only ERSI, 2024).

Indicator 3.4: The intention of this indicator is that the provider offers the children a music experience that is not informal singing. Therefore, even if informal singing is not observed, credit can be given if another type of music activity is observed. This indicator requires one staff-initiated music or movement activity that is not counted as informal singing. Either a "music activity" can be observed such as a formal singing time, finger plays, listening to

recorded music or playing music instruments. Movement is a type of music activity that requires use of large muscles when moving/dancing to music. The staff may initiate such activity with one child or in a group. (ERSI 2024)

Indicators 3.5, 5.3: If only one child is present, then a provider-led music activity is acceptable with just that one child participating. (ERSI 2024)

ITEM 18:

Alphabet blocks can be considered blocks for children birth to age 3. However, larger blocks that older children can use to build sizable structures are required (ERSI, 2024).

Indicator 1.2: (The book indicates the note below is for 1.1; it is for 1.2.)

If no child plays with blocks and the provider does not encourage block play in any way, then score Yes (ERSI, 2024).

ITEM 20:

Kinetic sand can count as an appropriate sand/water substitute but should not be used with children under 3 years of age or with children who tend to mouth materials because it poses a safety hazard if ingested.

Indicator 1.3: If the only observed nature/science staff involvement is negative, such as stepping on a cockroach indoors, killing a mosquito, or telling a child about her fear of snakes, then score this indicator Yes. However, if there are also positive instances observed, such as showing interest in plants, animals or the weather, and these outnumber the negative, score No. (ERSI 2024)

Indicator 3.1: Change the current note to: This indicator specifies “at least 5 pictures, books, games or toys” that represent nature realistically.” Even if other appropriate nature/science materials are accessible, credit should not be given here since the item refers specifically to pictures, books, games, or toys that represent nature realistically. (ERSI 2024)

Indicator 5.1: The ten materials, representing two categories, do not include sand/water, which is considered separately in this indicator. For sand and /or water to be counted as accessible, children must be able to reach and use them during the observation for a reasonable amount of time that allows satisfying productive play, but not necessarily for the amount of time to meet “accessibility” at the 5 level of quality for other materials. If weather does not permit outdoor use, then sand and/or water must be made accessible indoors. (ERSI 2024)

ITEM 22:

In some settings computer screen savers are used on monitors as a constant part of the environment. If children are not using the technology, or being made to watch it as an activity and are not observed to be attracted to it in any way then do not consider this in scoring. If a child spends a very brief time using screen time (less than 5 minutes) and this is a rare occurrence during the observation, mark the item NA (ERSI, 2024).

NC assessment participants should be reminded that per the NC Child Care Rules, screen time is prohibited for children under the age of 3 years.

Indicator 1.2: The NFC for indicators 3.2 and 5.1 on page 58 also applies to indicator 1.2.

ITEM 23:

Indicator 1.3 3.3: A prejudicial statement or action made by staff, other adults, or children should be addressed with appropriate intervention, whether the statement or action was intentional or done with malice. Prejudicial statements or actions considered in these indicators are those that:

- Demean, mock, devalue, or threaten others based on preconceived opinions or feelings
- Disregard family preferences
- Perpetuate myths or misinformation about a group of people
- Demonstrate an attitude of negativity or fear, either verbally or nonverbally

ITEM 24:

Indicator 3.2, 5.1: Because of possible timing error, a two-minute exception is allowed because it is so difficult to track time to the second. However, no more than two minutes can be lacking to meet the time requirements in these indicators (ERSI, 2024).

Indicator 3.3 and 5.3: A fall zone with protective surfacing is not required for items designed/ intended for purposes other than gross motor play (e.g., picnic table, bench, retaining wall, a rock or stump that is away from the usual gross motor equipment). If such items are used for gross motor activities such as jumping or climbing, this may be considered in item 25 as a supervision concern if these behaviors are encouraged or prevalent during the observation and occur in an unsafe manner.

ITEM 25:

Indicator 3.1, 5.1: To give credit for these indicators, some outdoor gross motor play must be observed for children 12 months and older, weather permitting. There is no specific time requirement for outdoor gross motor play, but it must be enough time to be a satisfying experience for the children (ERSI, 2024).

Indicator 7.2: The indicator requires that the staff help children develop a new gross motor skill and/or to use more challenging equipment. Only one of these needs to be observed (ERSI, 2024).

ITEM 27:

Indicators 3.3, 7.2: In some cases, a provider may show mild negativity with a child. If this happens very infrequently and other responses are overwhelmingly positive, 3.3 can still be scored Yes. However, if mild negativity is observed more often, score No. (ERSI 2024)

ITEM 30:

Indicator 7.3: The intent of this indicator is for the provider to “teach” children how to work or play together in a satisfying way. It requires more than just making materials accessible and telling children to use them at the same time. For example, putting out a bin of interlocking toys and having children build independently with them is not enough to give credit. The provider must actively encourage children to work or play together, so they coordinate and cooperate in what they are doing in a way that is appropriate based on their abilities (ERSI, 2024).

ITEM 33:

Indicator 5.3: Delete the note that says to see the definition of accessible at beginning of scale. It does not apply here. The alternate materials should be accessible during the group time (This portion of the note is for first printing only ERSI, 2024).

References:

Harms, T., Cryer, D., Clifford, R.M., & Yazejian, N. (2019). Family child care environment rating scale. (Third edition). New York, NY. Teachers College Press.
 FCCERS-3 Additional Notes for Clarification found on the Environment Rating Scales Institute website (www.ersi.info/)