



Understanding the Environment Rating Scale

Prepared by the Early Childhood Consultants at Child Care Aware® of North Dakota

This resource will help you understand what happens before, during and after an ERS observation.

The Environment Rating Scales, developed at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, are a common resource used in early care and education settings to see how well a program is meeting children's needs—to see whether children receive the protection, learning opportunities, and positive relationships they need for successful development.

The Environment Rating Scales include the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale, Revised (ITERS-R), The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised (ECERS-R), the Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale, Revised (FCCERS-R) and the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale.

In order to evaluate what quality looks like, two indicators are looked at closely:

1. Structural Indicators – mandatory requirements (often addressed by regulations and are a minimal basis for quality, such as state licensing)
2. Process Quality Indicators – looking at the quality of care (interactions, arrangement of space, daily schedules, and how children interact with each other and the space)

The Environment Rating Scale (ERS) tools are designed to assess process quality indicators. These quality indicators have been found to be more predictive of child outcomes than the minimal structural indicators.

What are the benefits of using Environment Rating Scales?

- Improving Program Quality
- Identifying Training Needs
- Identifying and Selecting Materials and Resources
- Identifying Program Strengths and Areas of Improvement
- Challenging You In New Ways
- Providing a Self Assessment
- Providing a Common Language When Trying To Clarify and Quantify Quality
- Helping You Sharpen Your Skills

The Environment Rating Scales are one tool that is used in the voluntary Bright & Early North Dakota program to measure child care quality and to serve as a resource for setting quality improvement goals. A coach from Child Care Aware® of North Dakota is available to help you understand how to use these tools as well as give you feedback as you set goals for quality improvement. Your Child Care Aware® Coach is available to encourage your efforts towards continuous quality improvement and to provide constructive feedback on your goals.

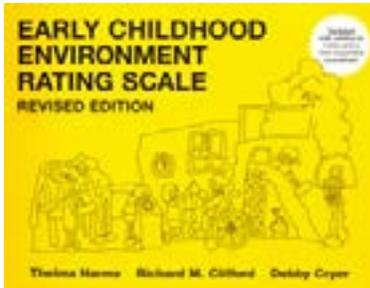
Before the Environment Rating Scale Observation

There are many key people that have to get ready for an environment rating scale observation. This section will look at how to prepare staff and/or providers, parents, and children.

Preparing Staff and Providers

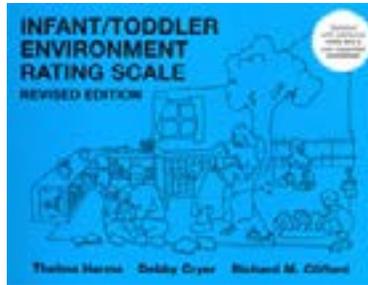
Participating in an environment rating scale (ERS) observation can be exciting and nerve-racking! Let's take a look at how you can be more prepared to ease your nerves as much as possible. (Don't worry. It is all right to be a little nervous.)

- Select the tool that is appropriate for your setting. Here is a closer look at what the recommended use is for each tool.



EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE, REVISED EDITION

Designed to assess group programs for children of preschool through kindergarten age, 3 through 5.



INFANT/TODDLER ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE, REVISED EDITION

Designed to assess group programs for children from birth to 3 years of age.



FAMILY CHILD CARE ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE, REVISED EDITION

Designed to assess family child care programs conducted in a provider's home for children from infancy through school-age.

- Choose the tool you will most likely be using. Contact your Child Care Aware® coach, if you are unsure of the appropriate tool. If in a facility, make a list of the classrooms and note which tool each classroom will most likely use.
- Review the appropriate rating scale tool book. Let's look at some options where you can purchase or borrow the tool so you can really become familiar with it.
- Ask your Child Care Aware® Coach for more information on ERS resource books.
- Many early childhood resource vendors carry the ERS rating scale books. Here are some to check out:
 - www.amazon.com
 - www.kaplanco.com
 - www.redleafpress.org
 - www.lakeshorelearning.com
- Check for Additional Notes for Clarifications to the Environment Rating Scale. Regular updates are made to the ERS tools, and posted to the website: <https://www.ersi.info>

After you receive your book(s), you will want to go to this website and download the most recent updated notes for clarification. If you purchase your book, we recommend you tape the notes on the appropriate pages so you always know what the most up- to-date information is.

- Access Training Related to the Environment Rating scales. In addition to reviewing the ERS book, you may want to get more familiar with the tool you will be using by accessing training.

The Environment Rating Scales Institute (ERSI) offers four on-line introductory courses on the Environment Rating Scales. Each course is approximately 4 clock hours in length. Courses include:

- ERS 101 (a prerequisite for any the following three courses) ECERS-R 101
- ITERS-R 101
- FCCERS-R 101

For more information on the ERSI online course offerings, including registration and fees, go to: https://www.ersi.info/training_online.html

Check out the ERS tip sheets, checklists and other resources posted to the Child Care Aware® of North Dakota website: <http://ndchildcare.org/projects/bright> to guide you through the process. Many helpful tips will be addressed in the posted resources, but reading the ERS tool book will give you the most accurate picture of what the Child Care Aware® Coach/Bright and Early Assessor will be looking for.

As you dig into the ERS tool it is important to note: all children have 3 basic needs: protection of health and safety, building relationships, and opportunities for stimulation and learning from experiences. All three are key aspects of process quality which are measured in the ERS and it takes all three to build quality care.

We are going to break down each of these needs with some helpful information to get you ready for your ERS observation.

1. Protection of Health and Safety is addressed by the personal care routines subscale of the ERS. It will be helpful for you to read through the personal care routines section of the ERS tool you will be using. For additional information and health/safety tips go to the Child Care Aware® of North Dakota website at <http://ndchildcare.org/providers/health-safety.html>
 2. Building Relationships is addressed in the Listening and Talking, Language-Reasoning, and Interaction subscales of the ERS tool. Tip sheets related to these relationship building indicators can be found at: <http://ndchildcare.org/projects/bright>
 3. Opportunities for Stimulation and Learning from Experiences is addressed throughout the scale. It will be helpful to conduct an inventory of materials you currently have in your program. You will want to look at what you have currently available for children, what you have in storage, and what might be too worn out to use. For more information go to <http://ndchildcare.org/projects/bright/> and look for the Conducting an Inventory of Play Materials and the Materials Lists for the ITERS-R, ECERS-R, and FCCERS-R. These lists will be helpful when looking for materials to purchase for your program as well.
- Some items in the ERS tool are not easily seen during an observation, so following the observation (either at nap time or by having extra staff covering your room) your Bright and Early Assessor will need about 30 minutes to ask you some follow-up questions. These questions are listed in the ERS tool, following the notes for clarification. It may be beneficial to read through these questions prior to your observation so you know what to expect.

Preparing the staff and/or provider for what the tool will assess is just the first step. You must also prepare parents and children for the observation.

Preparing Parents

- Inform parents of your participation in the Bright and Early North Dakota programming and let them know you are working on improving the quality of the care their child receives
- Let them know that a Bright and Early Assessor will be spending time observing the staff/provider, the children, their interactions and the environment
- Explain to parents that in order to be objective, interactions from the Bright and Early Assessor will be kept to a minimum during the observation
- Assure parents that all information is kept highly confidential

Preparing Children

Children are naturally curious about their surroundings and may act differently when someone new is in the classroom or home. They may be shy or expect that the new person will be there to play with them. It is important that you prepare your children for the visitor in the program.

- Inform the children that a visitor will be coming
- Let children know the visitor will be watching them play, writing things down on a computer and looking at their toys
- Explain to the children that the visitor isn't going to be able to talk to them until after they have seen and heard all the fun things they do

Day of the Observation

The big day is here! What do you need to know?

- We know you will likely be nervous to have a new person in your program watching what you do for 3-4 hours. Try to relax and stay calm.
- The Bright and Early Assessor is trained to fade into the background as much as possible during the observation.
- After initially greeting you and gathering some preliminary information, the Bright and Early Assessor will not be interacting with you or the children until the end of the observation. You can say to the children, "She is here to watch you play." The observer will not be able to help with supervision or help out with the children.
- Try to keep the day as normal as possible. The Bright and Early Assessor understand how children behave, especially when there is a new person in the room. Sticking to normal routines will help the children know what is coming and what is expected of them as well.
- You will get the most accurate observation results if the majority of enrolled children are present for the observation. This will allow the Bright and Early Assessor to get a real snap shot of what happens on a typical day in your program. It will not benefit you to ask specific children or families to stay at home during the observation.
- You will also want to keep your staffing patterns as normal as possible during the observation.
- The Bright and Early Assessor may ask to see extra materials to give you credit for things you have in storage as well. They will also look through all materials and cupboards accessible to children.
- The Bright and Early Assessor will be asking some questions at the end of the observation; this is because they need additional information to score an item than what was able to be observed.
- You may have more than one Bright and Early Assessor in your program on your observation day. Child Bright and Early Assessor need to demonstrate reliability with the tools and occasionally this includes conducting an observation with someone else to check their consistency with interpreting and scoring items. You will be informed ahead of time, if this will occur.

After the Observation

So your observation is complete... now what?

Once your observation has been completed by the Bright and Early Assessor, they will review their notes and finalize their scores. The Bright and Early Assessor is trained to be objective and to follow the tool and its requirements as designed. The information gathered from the observation will play a vital role in understanding how your programming compares to the Environment Rating Scale indicators.

Remember: These observations are a snapshot in time and the conditions that existed during the observation may not exist at other times. For example, during the observation, it is possible that an outlet could be uncovered, but during a subsequent visit, this was corrected.

Summary Report

Following your observation, a summary report will be made available to you. This report will identify your program's strengths and potential areas of growth.

The Child Care Aware® Coach will review your practice observation report with you and respond to any questions you may have. It is important that you receive as much information as possible on areas that you would like to focus on for your quality improvement efforts. The "rationales" within the report will give you details that will help you create an improvement plan and set goals.

**Identified areas for improvement can at times be made by making small changes. For example, it could be as simple as lowering displayed pictures to a child's level, or purchasing another set of blocks. Other items within the ERS tool may be more difficult to change. For example, it could be that you do not have child-sized toilets and you don't have the funds to make this change. As a program, you will want to identify which areas can be more easily addressed at this time and focus on those specific areas. There will be things that you may not be able to change, as in structural alterations or space of current environment and this is okay. The goal is to work on what you can and are able to do to move towards improvement.*

Understanding your Scores

- No one indicator is powerful enough to assure the child's positive development
- A program doesn't have to be perfect, but it does have to be "good enough" to encourage positive development
- The environment rating scales are flexible in how programs can become better. Always keep trying to improve what you can do well.
- Ask yourself:
 - How can I maximize the good and minimize the bad?
 - How can we make this better for children?
 - What things can we choose to change?
- You may not be able to change everything right away – short term goals can be done immediately. Long term goal setting may be helpful for goals that initially seem very time consuming or out of reach financially.
- You may need help from others to complete long term plans and goals

Ways to use the Summary report:

- Setting goals for your program
- Creating goals that identify areas of improvement
- Determine topics to address within your program or with your team
- Prioritize areas to focus your improvement efforts
- Help direct training needs of your program
- Make wish lists of items that need to be purchased

The goal of the ERS observation process is to help you identify areas of quality in your program as well as improve the quality of care you provide. To help you enhance the quality of care you provide and boost your ERS scores, go to <http://ndchildcare.org/projects/bright/> and check out the article, *Boosting Your ERS Score*.

Your Child Care Aware® Coach is available to encourage you and provide feedback on your goals. They are excited for you and your accomplishments as you strive toward providing high quality care to children.