



## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALES (ERS)**

### ***OVERVIEW OF THE ERS:***

#### **Q: WHY DOES DELAWARE STARS USE THE ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALES (ERS) TO EVALUATE PROGRAMS?**

**A:** Each scale is grounded in research, rigorously field tested, proven valid and reliable and continually updated for clarity and to reflect best practice and current research in the early childhood field. The ERS are among the most commonly used instruments used in Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) like Delaware Stars. The ERS serves as a tool to measure aspects of quality.

#### **Q: DO I NEED TO READ THE ALL ABOUT THE ECERS-R AND ALL ABOUT THE ITERS-R?**

**A:** The “All About” books are guides to help improve your understanding of the ECERS-R and the ITERS-R. Keep in mind that the “All About” books are references and the scale is considered the “rule” when deciding on the score for the indicator. The “All About” books do not contain every scenario or account for every individual situation and therefore should be used strictly as a guide. While the scales are continually updated, the “All About” books are not, so at times they may no longer reflect the current interpretation of an indicator. You do not have to read both books in their entirety but you may find it helpful to use them as a complement to the scales when you have difficulty understanding an indicator.

#### **Q: HOW CAN I GET AN OVERALL SCORE OF A 7 ON THE ERS?**

**A:** The ERS was never written with the expectation for programs to get a 7 overall average. An average score of 5 indicates “good” or developmentally appropriate practice whereas a score of 7 indicates excellent or enhancements to practice. The ERS is intended to give a realistic and objective view of what the children get from the program, including strengths and areas of potential growth. Perfection is not required or expected. It is the combination of strengths in multiple areas that translate into an overall average of a 5.00. There aren’t any single items that are more important to quality than others. To get the best score possible, be reflective and dedicated to long term quality improvement and spend time carefully reading and understanding the indicators to provide the best possible quality of care for the children in your particular program.

### ***CLASSROOM SELECTION PROCESS***

#### **Q: HOW ARE THE CLASSROOMS CHOSEN TO BE ASSESSED?**

**A:** Programs may choose the room assessed when requesting a practice assessment. When you submit for verification, you will need to provide correct and up to date information for each classroom/group in your program to be entered into the Delaware Stars database. Delaware Stars uses this information to select a random sampling of classrooms/groups, which is necessary for a valid assessment. Random selection will occur on-site when the assessor arrives and is done objectively. For each age group that

your program serves, at least one-third of the classrooms in that age group will be selected for assessment. Age groups\* include infants (birth through 11 months), toddlers (between the ages of 12 and 30 months), preschoolers (30 months-5 years), and school-agers (kindergarten and up). When a classroom consists of children who are under 12 months **AND** 12 months and over, the age of the majority of children will determine if it is an infant age group or a toddler age group. Similarly, when a classroom consists of children who are under 30 months **AND** 30 months and over, the age of the majority of children will determine if it is a toddler age group or a preschool age group. If it is exactly 50% of each, the age group for the older children will be used. See the chart below for specific information regarding the “one-third” rule.

For example, using the chart below, if your program has three ITERS-R classrooms, which consist of one infant room and two toddler rooms, then you will have two ITERS-R assessments - one infant room ITERS-R and one toddler room ITERS-R.

Number of Classrooms per Age Group	Number of Assessments per Age Group
1-3	1
4-6	2
7-9	3
10-12	4

\*The age groups designated for random selection of classrooms are delineated in the ERS tools by the authors. This determines which classrooms are selected and which ERS tool is utilized for assessment. OCCL regulations also define age groups for programs to follow. The age groups vary from those in the ERS tools for Center-based care regulations as well as Family Child Care regulations.

**Q: CAN MY ROOM BE SELECTED FOR AN ASSESSMENT TWICE?**

**A:** Remember that because classrooms/groups are randomly and objectively selected, there is no increased or decreased chance that previously selected rooms or rooms which have had practice or verification assessments will be selected. Each room has an equal chance of being selected for each verification.

**Q: WHAT DAYS SHOULD I CHOOSE TO BE MY “BLACK OUT” DATES?**

**A:** Programs may select up to 7 “black out” dates within the 60 calendar day assessment window where assessments will not be scheduled. Black out dates should be used to denote any day that is not a typical day. Examples of these include weekdays when the center is closed, special events like field trips, class parties, picture days and vacation days of lead staff members.

The following holidays are days off for the DE Stars staff and therefore do **NOT** need to be included in black out dates: Martin Luther King Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, General Election Day (even numbered years), Thanksgiving Day, and Friday following Thanksgiving Day, December Holiday Break (Christmas Eve through New Year’s Day). If you find you have more than 7 days that are not typical during your 60 calendar day assessment window, you may want to submit for verification at another time. Programs will not be given any more than the original 7 “black out” dates they submit when requesting an ERS assessment, unless there is a prescheduled break that aligns with the DE Stars policy. Please see the next question for details regarding the policy.

**Q: MY PROGRAM HAS SPRING BREAK DURING THE 60 CALENDAR DAY ASSESSMENT WINDOW. CAN I HAVE ADDITIONAL BLACK OUT DAYS?**

**A:** See the previous question regarding the typical 7 blackout dates permitted. DE Stars recognizes that there are certain times in the year when it is difficult to select only 7 days due to a prescheduled break. It is recommended that programs would request Verification and Assessment at another time. However, if a program chooses to request during the time of a prescheduled break, such as Spring Break, the program may choose to remove those days and add the same number of days to the end of their 60-day window. In addition to Spring Break, this may be done for winter holiday break (for any days in which DE Stars is not already closed) and state observed holidays that the program is closed and DE Stars is in operation. These state observed holidays in which DE Stars is not already closed are: Good Friday, Election Day (odd years), Return Day (after 12 noon Sussex County), & Veterans Day.

**Q: MY PROGRAM IS CLOSED OTHER DAYS, THAT ARE NOT LISTED ABOVE, WITHIN MY 60 CALENDAR DAY ASSESSMENT WINDOW. CAN I ADD THOSE ONTO THE END OF MY 60-DAY WINDOW?**

**A:** No, those days may not be added onto the end of the 60 calendar day assessment window. They will need to be factored into the allowable 7 blackout dates instead.

**Q: IS THERE A MINIMUM AMOUNT OF TIME A CLASSROOM MUST OPERATE TO BE ASSESSED?**

**A:** Sometimes a program may have a longer program in the morning than in the afternoon. So, if there's an option for a 3-hour assessment, the classrooms operating longer would be part of the random selection. However, if no other option is available, and the classroom operates at least 2 ½ hours then it would be part of the random selection to be assessed. If the classroom operates less than 2 ½ hours, then it would not be assessed.

This policy does not apply to the SACERS-UPDATED for an after-care program.

**Q: WHAT IF MY PROGRAM HAS DIFFERENT GROUPS OF CHILDREN ATTENDING DIFFERENT DAYS OF THE WEEK (FOR EXAMPLE: ONE CLASS IS SCHEDULED MONDAY, WEDNESDAY, FRIDAY; ANOTHER CLASS IS SCHEDULED TUESDAY, THURSDAY) OR DIFFERENT TIMES OF THE DAY (FOR EXAMPLE: HALF-DAY PROGRAM IN THE MORNING AND HALF-DAY PROGRAM IN THE AFTERNOON)?**

For part-day programs, Random Selection will be based on the following guidelines for classrooms with different children attending different days of the week or different times of the day:

- Classroom with same lead staff, same age group = 1 classroom
- Classroom with same lead staff, different age group, same scale = 1 classroom
- Classroom with same lead staff, different age group, different scale = 2 classrooms
- Classroom with different lead staff for different groups = 2 classrooms

**Q: MY PROGRAM HAS A KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM. CAN IT BE CHOSEN FOR AN ASSESSMENT?**

**A:** Programs that have kindergarten classrooms regulated by the Department of Education (DOE) are not considered to be a part of Stars and are not included in the Star Level Designation (SLD) of that program. These classrooms would not receive an assessment as the ERS does not cover the instructional portion of the day. However, if the majority of children in the classroom are preschool children, then the classroom would be part of the random selection of classrooms to be assessed.

Also, if the facility offers an after-care program for these classrooms, then the after-care portion would be assessed using the SACERS-UPDATED.

**Q: HOW IS THE ASSESSMENT HANDLED FOR PROGRAMS WITH NON-TRADITIONAL HOURS?**

**A:** If a program has a traditional hour classroom, then it would be part of the random selection to be assessed & the non-traditional hours room would **not** be part of random selection. If this is a program that only offers overnight or evening care, it would typically not be assessed. However, the schedule would be reviewed to determine if there was a 2 ½ - 3 hour span where the assessor could observe the required activities/routines. If these requirements were met, then an assessment would occur.

**Q: MY PROGRAM OFFERS AN ENRICHMENT PROGRAM FOR THE OLDER PRESCHOOLERS WHILE THE YOUNGER CHILDREN NAP. WILL THIS CLASSROOM BE ASSESSED?**

**A:** In most cases, these programs would not be assessed because all the items required for the ERS may not happen at this time. However, if your enrichment program has a separate enrollment and operates for more than 3 hours, it is possible it would be part of the random selection of classrooms to be picked for an assessment.

**Q: WILL A SACERS-UPDATED BE CONDUCTED WITH A SMALL NUMBER OF SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN MIXED IN WITH PRESCHOOLERS?**

**A:** The majority of children in that classroom will determine which scale would be used. So in situations where some school-age children are in the same group as preschool children and more than half are preschoolers, the program would have an ECERS-R instead of a SACERS-UPDATED.

**Q: HOW WILL SCHOOL-AGE PROGRAMS BE ASSESSED IN THE SUMMER TIME?**

**A:** The assessment will take place in the morning, (typically beginning between 8:00-8:30 and ending soon after lunch), with the interview occurring after the observation, similar to the other types of assessments. If it is the regular schedule of a program to not be on site at all in the morning, then the assessment will be scheduled for the afternoon. The observation should include a meal/snack and must occur for a minimum of 2 hours (not including time for the interview).

**Q: HOW IS THE SACERS-UPDATED USED IN CLASSROOMS WITH CHILDREN OVER 12 YEARS OLD?**

**A:** If there are younger school-age classrooms from which to select, then the classrooms with children 12 years & younger would be part of random selection and the older rooms would **not** be part of random selection. If classrooms with children older than 12 years is the only option, then the SACERS-UPDATED would be used & certain items/indicators may be scored NA or automatically be given credit. In classrooms with children over 12 years **AND** 12 years and under, the majority of children in that classroom will determine if it would be part of the random selection.

**Q: I AM A FAMILY CHILD CARE PROGRAM WITH ONLY SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN. HOW WILL MY PROGRAM BE ASSESSED?**

**A:** The FCCERS-R will still be used for this program. Depending on the hours the children are present, the assessment may take place during both before and after care. If there's a required time for homework, this will be considered the equivalent to Group Time when determining the requirements for Much of the Day. The interview portion would occur at the end of the after-care observation.

**Q: I AM A FAMILY CHILD CARE PROGRAM WITH MULTI-AGE CHILDREN. DO ALL OF THE CHILDREN NEED TO BE PRESENT THE DAY OF THE ASSESSMENT?**

**A:** If family child care has children under 30 months and also has children 30 months and over enrolled, then at least one child from each age group, excluding school-age, must be present for the assessment to take place.

***PREPARING FOR THE ERS:***

**Q: WHEN WILL MY ASSESSMENT OCCUR?**

**A:** Assessors will arrive within 60 days of the assessment request date. They will not arrive on any day you have selected as one of your blackout dates.

**Q: WILL ALL ASSESSMENTS OCCUR ON THE SAME DAY?**

**A:** If a program requires more than one observation due to age-groups served and the number of rooms within the program, observations may occur on different days. Every attempt will be made to ensure all observations are completed within three weeks of the first room observed.

**Q: WHAT CAN I EXPECT DURING THE OBSERVATION?**

**A:** This visit is different from other visits you've probably had, such as TA visits or compliance visits from OCCL. The assessor will stay out of the way as much as possible and follow your class through a normal day. The assessor will be listening for interactions, and may position her- or himself in order to hear those interactions and accurately observe routines. S/he is trying to capture all of the positive things that are occurring with the staff and children.

Assessors are required to be objective and non-judgmental observers. Assessors will not interact with teachers or children during the assessment. If children approach the assessors, s/he will kindly redirect them.

Assessors are required to record scores based on the exact requirements of the scales. Therefore, the assessor will observe any areas that children can possibly access including all classroom materials, bathrooms, gross motor areas and closets.

**Q: WHY MIGHT THERE BE TWO ASSESSORS IN THE SAME CLASSROOM?**

**A:** All Delaware Stars ERS Assessors have completed a lengthy training and are required to remain reliable with the other assessors. Reliability refers to consistency of how the ERS measure is interpreted. Delaware Stars Assessors train to reliability to ensure they are using the same justifications to score items and produce similar overall scoring results. Reliability assessments occur when two assessors assess a classroom to assure similar scores and consistent interpretation of the scale and therefore, there may be two assessors in the same room. These reliability assessments are done frequently and continuously. Sometimes, technical assistants (TAs) may accompany an assessor on a visit to gain a better understanding of the ERS and the assessment process to share with their programs.

**Q: CAN WE ADD ADDITIONAL STAFF MEMBERS TO THE CLASSROOM THAT IS BEING ASSESSED?**

**A:** According to the definition of “staff,” items involving staff interactions are scored based on adults who are in the classroom and work with the children daily (or almost daily) for a substantial portion of the day/much of the day, unless the extra person interacts negatively with the children. Extra staff not normally in the room will not count in any items when it is required to observe “staff” doing something in particular, such as reading informally. Remember, the assessment should reflect a normal day. Additional staff may be needed and used to provide coverage for the lead staff during the interview portion of the assessment.

**Q: WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT DURING THE INTERVIEW?**

**A:** One lead staff will take part in an interview after the assessment. The assessor might ask questions about classroom patterns, use of materials, program policies, or other relevant questions. Although the interview portion of the assessment might seem overwhelming to some, it’s important to remember that as a teacher you likely already know the answers to most of these questions. The questions reflect your daily routines and common knowledge about the program. Answer the questions to the best of your ability, and always be truthful in your answers.

The interview is usually conducted after the children are settled for nap (or after dismissal in a part-day program). The administrator is not permitted to be present during the interview. Staff is not allowed to reference handbooks, props, or any other documents. For each room being assessed, be prepared to provide a relatively private setting as well as staff coverage for one lead staff for approximately 30-45 minutes. Be aware that the interviews may take place at approximately the same time if multiple rooms are being assessed on the same day.

**Q: HOW DOES THE INTERVIEW AFFECT MY SCORE?**

**A:** The score is based on what was observed (or reported as allowed) during the observation. If there is a discrepancy between what is reported and what was observed, the observation will always take precedence. The score for most items cannot be based on what occurs on other days, what the program intends to do in the future, or reports at a later time.

***THE ASSESSMENT IS COMPLETE***

**Q: MY CLASSROOM JUST GOT ASSESSED. HOW CAN I USE THE RESULTS TO IMPROVE MY CLASSROOM?**

**A:** Use the results from an ERS assessment to create goals and a concrete plan on how to achieve those goals. Appropriate short-term goals are things staff can realistically improve in a relatively short time. Examples of these goals might be adjusting the schedule or asking longer, more complex questions throughout the day. Long-term goals for improvement may require more funding or improvement to be gained gradually and worked on continuously. There are some items in the scales that the staff have little control over and may need to be a long-term goal and plan discussed with administration. Staff should reflect and focus on things they have power to improve upon and use the results of the assessment to advocate for positive change throughout the program.

**Q: WHEN CAN MY PROGRAM SEND IN ANOTHER REQUEST FOR VERIFICATION?**

**A:** The program may request verification again 90 days after the verification results have been shared.

**Q: WHEN WILL I RECEIVE MY VERIFICATION & ASSESSMENT RESULTS?**

**A:** The assessment summaries for each classroom/group observed and the Standards Verification summary report will be emailed to the program’s DE Stars Contact, (as listed in the DOE DE Stars database), within 15 business days of the final verification visit (including both the ERS assessment and standards visits). The program’s Technical Assistant (TA) will be copied on the email and will arrange for a visit to review the results.

**COMMONLY USED TERMS: ACCESSIBILITY**

**Q: WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT ITEMS HAVE TO BE ACCESSIBLE?**

**A:** In order for items to be considered accessible to children, the children should be able to reach the toys, materials, furnishings and/or equipment and also be allowed to use them. The most common way to make materials accessible is to place them on open shelves or in open bins within easy reach of the children.

If there are any barriers, either verbal or physical, preventing the children from reaching and using the materials, they won’t be considered accessible. Examples of items **not** being accessible are when materials are stored out of sight (under furniture or in opaque containers), are in containers with lids that children cannot open on their own, or are stored on high shelves where children cannot reach them, or when there is a “no touch” rule where items appear accessible but children are not allowed to use them. If materials are stored in large baskets/ bins where children cannot reach items in the bottom or have trouble finding the materials in them, or if materials are stored piled on top of each other, such as stacked puzzles that are difficult to access, they may be considered inaccessible.

**Q: HOW WOULD AN INFANT OR NON-MOBILE CHILD ACCESS MATERIALS?**

**A:** If children are not able to access the materials on their own, such as non-mobile infants, staff would need to either place the infant where she could reach the materials or place the materials within reach of the infant. In order to receive credit for accessibility during an observation, it would have to be evident that the staff regularly provides access to the variety of toys required for that particular item or indicator.

**Q: DO THE MATERIALS HAVE TO BE ACCESSIBLE ALL DAY?**

**A:** Unless otherwise stated in the specific indicator, children should have access to items for at least 1 hour out of an 8 - hour day for the items to be considered accessible. For programs open less than 8 hours, use the table to determine minimal accessibility time.

Number of hours in operation	2	3	4	5	6	7	8+
Minutes required for accessibility	15	25	30	40	45	50	60

**Q: DO ALL CHILDREN HAVE TO HAVE ACCESS TO ALL MATERIALS AT THE SAME TIME?**

**A:** Specifically in the ECERS-R, access may be limited to a certain number of children in an area or limited to certain times of the day. However, children must have a reasonable chance to use the materials given these limitations. For materials to be considered accessible in a preschool classroom, they must be within view of 2-3 year olds. For 4-5 year olds, if the materials are stored in closed spaces, they can be considered accessible only if it is observed that children can freely access and use the materials.

### **COMMONLY USED TERMS: SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF THE DAY AND MUCH OF THE DAY**

#### **Q: WHAT DOES “SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF THE DAY” MEAN?**

**A:** This term is used in the ECERS-R and means that at least one-third of the time the children are in attendance, access is required for that particular item. Substantial portion of the day is an actual calculation of the times accessibility occurs during the observation as well as the times estimated based on an accurate schedule and the staff report during the interview. Refer to the calculation chart on the ECERS-R Expanded Score Sheet. A copy of the chart is located at the back of the ECERS-R on Score Sheet p. 12. For Delaware Stars, children must have access to the required variety of materials for substantial portions of time that facilitate play throughout the day, not just very early in the morning at opening and late in the afternoon at closing.

#### **Q: HOW DOES GOING TO CHAPEL (OR MUSIC CLASS, SWIM LESSONS, ETC.) ONE OR TWO DAYS A WEEK AFFECT “SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF THE DAY” OR “MUCH OF THE DAY”?**

**A:** When determining the amount of time for Substantial Portion of the Day and Much of the Day, regularly scheduled events will be factored in if they impact the amount of time children have access to materials for free play, regardless which day the program is assessed. Programs should reflect on students’ access to materials during free play particularly on these days. Perhaps the regularly scheduled weekly activity could replace group time on those days so the children still have free play for a substantial portion of the day/much of the day.

#### **Q: I WORK IN A PART-DAY PRESCHOOL BUT SOME OF MY STUDENTS STAY FOR A LUNCH OPTION OR COME FOR BEFORE CARE. HOW DOES THIS AFFECT SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF THE DAY/MUCH OF THE DAY?**

**A:** If a classroom is operating as a part-day preschool, but offers an option of staying for lunch for a separate fee, Substantial Portion of the Day (SPOD)/Much of the Day (MOD) will be based on the regular pre-school hours. The lunch option time will be excluded as long as it is one hour or less.

If a classroom operating as a part-day preschool offers lunch lasting longer than one hour, before care, nap, and/or after care, the full operating hours will be used when determining Substantial Portion of the Day (SPOD) and the observation could include any of the above timeframes for ECERS-R or ITERS-R.

If a program has any combination of full-day classrooms and part-day classrooms, each room will be scored accordingly, depending on the schedule for the children in each classroom.

#### **Q: MY PROGRAM OPERATES UNDER NON-TRADITIONAL HOURS. WILL “SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF THE DAY” BE CALCULATED FOR THE ENTIRE TIME MY PROGRAM OPERATES?**

**A:** For the ECERS-R, calculating substantial portion of the day is based on up to 12 hours during the traditional hours of operation, 6:00am-6:00pm in most instances. This may vary based on the exact hours of a program operating under non-traditional hours, but would not exceed 12 hours. A program that only operates under non-traditional hours, may have different requirements that your TA can inform you of. If a program does not offer another "shift" or non-traditional hours, but operates more than 12 hours, then substantial portion of the day is based on the total hours of operation, which can exceed 12 hours. For example, a program open from 6:00am-6:30pm would base substantial portion of the day on 12.5 hours.

**Q: WHAT DOES "MUCH OF THE DAY" MEAN?**

**A:** This term is used in the ITERS-R and FCCERS-R, is based on the observation only, and does not require an exact calculation of time. Much of the day means that most of the time that **any** child may be awake and able to play the required materials must be accessible. Programs may not meet this requirement if children are prevented from using materials for long periods of time due to lengthy routines or group times, if they are confined in bouncy seats or exer-saucers where access is not possible, or if non-mobile infants are offered very few toys. For Delaware Stars, to receive credit, the activities must occur throughout the day, not just very early in the morning at opening and late in the afternoon at closing.

**Q: MY PROGRAM OPERATES UNDER NON-TRADITIONAL HOURS. HOW WILL "MUCH OF THE DAY" BE ASSESSED?**

**A:** For the FCCERS-R & ITERS-R, much of the day is based on observation only. If a program offers more than one shift, the regular daytime shift will be used to determine the required 1 hr. of accessibility. For programs offering non-traditional hours, the 1 hr. required for accessibility, if not observed, will be based on the traditional hours of care, typically 6:00am-6:00pm.

**Q: WHAT IF THE MORNING TIME IS STRUCTURED, BUT THE CHILDREN HAVE ACCESS TO THE MATERIALS IN THE AFTERNOON WHEN THE ASSESSOR IS NOT THERE?**

**A:** In the ECERS-R only, the times in the early morning and afternoon can be factored in as part of the "Substantial Portion of the Day" calculation if it is evident by the posted schedule, the observation, and the provider report that this occurs daily. In the FCCERS-R and the ITERS-R, some consideration will be given to the early morning and afternoon schedule only when determining if children have access to materials to meet the required one hour amount of time for "accessible." However, in the FCCERS-R and the ITERS-R, access to materials to meet the requirements of "much of the day" will be scored based on the observation only and will not factor in the schedule or provider report regarding access to the materials earlier or later in the day. In addition, if children move from activity to activity in groups, even if they are engaged, but are not freely allowed to leave, "much of the day" will not be met since the children do not have access to the materials while in these groups. In order to be considered "freely allowed to leave," it must be obvious to the children that they can leave the group with alternatives readily available either visually or announced verbally by the staff or both.

**Q: WHY DOES MY SUMMARY REPORT MENTION THAT A CHILD WAS CONFINED FOR MORE THAN 20 MINUTES?**

**A:** If any child who is ready to play is prevented from reaching and using materials for a total of 20 minutes per every 3 hours of observation, then credit cannot be given for much of the day. This typically affects many items throughout the scale. The 20 minutes can be calculated as a combination of

smaller time periods that add up to 20 minutes within a 3 hour time period and does not have to occur all at one time. However, a cranky baby who may need to be held and soothed may not be “ready to play” and therefore that “cranky” time does not count towards the 20 minutes. Infants who are held and receive regular positive staff interaction will not be considered contained as long as it is clear the infant wants to be held and is benefiting from the positive experience.

**Q: WHAT IF AN INFANT IS REQUIRED TO REMAIN CONFINED IN A SEAT DUE TO REFLUX?**

**A:** In order to receive credit when infants with reflux need to be contained after feeding, assessors must be provided with documentation from a medical provider upon arrival to the program, the child must be actively engaged, and the child should not be contained for longer than 30 consecutive minutes.

**Q: DOES THE 20 MINUTE RULE APPLY TO VERY YOUNG INFANTS WHO CAN’T REALLY PLAY WITH MATERIALS?**

**A:** The 20 minute rule applies to all children. However, while very young infants are confined, for example, held on the lap, the 20 minute rule does not apply if they are engaged. Accessibility for particular items in the scale would be based upon the types of materials/toys that are made accessible to the infant by the staff. Examples of a young infant being engaged by having items made accessible to him would include staff shaking a rattle in front of the infant, placing a soft doll against his body, or holding a book up close to the infant as they describe the pictures and let the infant touch the book.

**Q: I HEARD WE CAN’T STAY OUTSIDE LONGER ON A NICE, SUNNY DAY – WHY NOT?**

**A:** The ERS actually encourages children to go outside every day. The only concern with staying outside too long is that if children are kept outdoors for 1/3 of the day or more, thereby limiting access to the materials indoors, credit cannot be given for much of the day. This would rarely occur as a typical program operating from 7:00am-6:00pm is open 11 hours and would have to keep the children outside for over 3 ½ hours in order for that to affect their score regarding much of the day. If you choose to take materials outside, the required variety must be accessible in order to receive credit towards “much of the day”.

**Q: IS IT OKAY TO TAKE INFANTS AND TODDLERS ON STROLLER RIDES?**

**A:** All children need active physical play indoors and outdoors. Therefore, it is recommended that when children are taken outside, they are able to participate in active physical play. If stroller rides are longer than 20 minutes, credit cannot be given for “much of the day” in the active physical play item since children are not able to freely move around when confined in a stroller. If most of the children are generally engaged, even if some children fall asleep, and no child shows distress during a stroller ride that is less than 20 minutes, this time is not factored into the 20 minutes when children do not have access to materials. However, if most of the children are not engaged during most of the stroller ride, it will be considered when determining much of the day in the peer interaction item. Furthermore, if the children are waiting for 3 minutes or longer with no access to play materials while being taken in and out of the strollers, this waiting time will count towards the 20 minutes when children cannot access the materials.

**Q: IS CIRCLE TIME OKAY FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS?**

**A:** Group time activities, such as circle time, are not required for infants and toddlers. If you choose to have group time, you will want to keep it short and engaging, not overly encourage children to remain in group, and stop when most children are no longer engaged. Within a 3 hour period, formal group times totaling up to 20 minutes are acceptable. After 20 minutes of group times, time children are expected to be in groups will start counting towards “much of the day.”

## ***OUTDOOR TIME***

### **Q: DO WE HAVE TO TAKE THE CHILDREN OUTSIDE EVERYDAY?**

**A:** OCCL Regulations require that programs provide daily opportunities for outdoor play and provide guidelines for outdoor play.

### **Q: MY PROGRAM GOES TO A PUBLIC PARK FOR GROSS MOTOR PLAY. HOW DOES THE ERS ASSESS THIS?**

**A:** The assessor will score the gross motor play and gross motor area used on the day of the assessment. If you use the public park on the day of the assessment, the assessor will accompany the staff and children to observe the area and children’s play. If you do not use the public park during the assessment, the public park will not factor into the assessment. The assessor may ask questions about where gross motor play typically occurs and ask to see any indoor or outdoor gross motor areas on the premises of the program. The program should be able to demonstrate the intent that children play outside almost every day.

## ***HEALTH AND SAFETY***

### **Q: WHAT ARE “KEEP OUT OF REACH” ITEMS?**

**A:** Keep out of reach (KOR) items are items that state “Keep out of reach of children” on the label. These items must be locked away. Storing them out of reach such as on a high shelf or in an unlocked cabinet is not sufficient. Locked away means that items must be stored behind a lock and key, working child-safety lock, or magnetic lock that children cannot open. Some common items in child care programs are diaper creams, Vaseline, powder, sunscreen, hand sanitizer, toothpaste, cleaning supplies, air fresheners, medicine, shaving cream, rubber cement, white out, lotions, and make-up. It is important to read the labels of these and other items to determine if they are KOR.

### **Q: IS MY FIRST AID KIT CONSIDERED TO BE A “KEEP OUT OF REACH” ITEM?**

**A:** The first aid kit is not required to be locked away. However, if it contains items labeled “keep out of reach of children” or other hazardous items, it must not be accessible to the children. Medication should **not** be stored in a first aid kit and medication must be locked away.

### **Q: DOES AN EPI-PEN NEED TO BE LOCKED AWAY LIKE OTHER “KEEP OUT OF REACH” ITEMS?**

**A:** An Epi-pen is an exception that does not have to be locked away but should not be accessible to the children. Any other emergency medication exceptions should be discussed with your TA and may require medical documentation.

### **Q: DOES THE SPRAY BOTTLE WITH THE BLEACH & WATER SOLUTION HAVE TO BE LOCKED AWAY?**

**A:** If the bleach is diluted according to the guidelines, then the bleach and water solution is not considered a keep out of reach item and therefore does not have to be locked away. However, it should not be kept where children can access it. The bottle of bleach itself is a keep out of reach item and must be locked away, though. It is recommended to use a new, clear bottle rather than re-use one that has had a previous cleaner in it as they are often labeled “keep out of reach of children” and then would need to be locked away.

**Q: MY DISH DETERGENT AND HAND SOAP SAY “KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN.” DO THEY HAVE TO BE LOCKED AWAY?**

**A:** Only the large quantities of these particular items, such as refill bottles, must be locked away. The typical size used at a sink for hand washing or for dish washing is not required to be locked away.

## **ACTIVITIES**

**Q: CAN I USE FOOD IN ART OR TO MAKE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS?**

**A:** Food will not be counted as an art or music material. The possible health, sanitation, safety, and supervision issues will be considered as well.

**Q: DO I HAVE TO USE SAND AND WATER IN MY SENSORY TABLE?**

**A:** Food will not be counted as sand or water play. The possible health, sanitation, safety, and supervision issues will be considered as well. Many food items that might be used in place of sand, such as dried beans, pose a safety concern for young children. Non-food materials used as substitutes for sand/water must be able to be used for the same actions as sand/water play such as digging, measuring, and pouring in order to count as alternatives.

**Q: WHY CAN'T I USE FOOD IN THE ACTIVITIES?**

**A:** One reason food is not considered an appropriate substitute is because it is unsanitary to use in activities. Children often eat the food without the proper sanitation and health procedures being used. The use of food as a material to play with is often confusing, especially to young children, as they are still learning about the proper uses of food and art materials. Additionally, wasting food rather than eating it may be offensive to families or disrespectful to homes and cultures where food is in short supply.

**Q: IS IT OKAY TO DO COOKING ACTIVITIES WITH THE CHILDREN?**

**A:** Yes, cooking activities that involve the children are fine. Cooking activities often provide opportunities for children to develop their math and science skills as well.

**Q: WHAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHEN CHOOSING APPROPRIATE BOOKS FOR MY CLASSROOM?**

**A:** Consider pictures and text when choosing books for your classroom. Eliminate any that include violence or frightening images. Be aware that some favorite fairy tales can be graphic and can have violent content. Check books on a regular basis and eliminate or repair books that are in poor condition.