

Using the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale®[®], Revised (ITERS-R)

WHO SHOULD USE THIS INFORMATION?

The following information is designed to assist ExceleRate™ Quality Specialists and Infant-Toddler Child Care Specialists as they partner with childcare programs serving infants and toddlers in Illinois.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

Interactions between caregivers and children must have a sufficient level of social, language, and cognitive stimulation to have a positive impact on children’s academic and social outcomes (Fuller, et al, 2010; Miervino, 2014). Children need language nutrition – language exposure that is *rich in both quantity and quality* as providers talk, interact, and read with children (Weldon 2014). A quality program must provide for the three basic needs all children have:

- Protection of their health and safety
- Building positive relationships
- Opportunities for stimulation and learning from experience

WHERE DO I START?

As you plan next steps in quality improvement, note that lower level indicators reflect practices that are not adequate for the care and teaching of young children. The items at level 7 represent minimum requirements for high-quality practice; therefore, providers should aim for the highest level of quality:

- Items at level 1 represent inadequate quality care
- Items at level 3 represent minimal quality care - a score of 3 and under
- Items at level 5 represent good quality care - a score of 3 to less than 5
- Items at level 7 represent excellent care - a score of five and above

WHERE DO I FIND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION?

The Environment Rating Scales Institute website provides extensive information for quality specialists and providers: <http://www.ersi.info/iters.html>

- See explanation of terms and updates from ERSI: http://www.ersi.info/iters_notes.html
- See supplementary materials: <http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/g-supplementary-materials-iters-r>
- The *All About ITERS-R* book provides detailed explanations and resources.

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WHAT ARE SOME KEY AREAS FOR GROWTH?

Enrich Infants' cognitive and physical experiences.

- All non-mobile children should have a variety of toys and materials brought to them. Minimize the amount of time non-mobile children are restricted by being placed in high chairs, bouncers, or playpens. Children should be unrestricted in movement and have full access to materials.
- Staff should be on the floor with non-mobile children to engage them in conversation, read books, and share communication about a variety of toys, materials, and activities.

Facilitate active physical play outdoors at least one hour daily year-round, weather permitting.

- In Illinois, the term "weather permitting" means temperatures between 25 and 90 degrees, taking into consideration the wind chill. In cold weather and especially between 25 and 30 degrees, children should be monitored to ensure they are well-dressed. In warm temperatures and especially at 90 degrees, adults should monitor children carefully and ensure that they have appropriate sun protection and hydration.

Be aware of outdoor safety guidelines and hazards.

- For a basic overview of playground guidelines and safety information, please visit the Environment Rating Scales Website: http://www.ersi.info/iters_supmaterials.html
- If a playground has a poured or installed foam or rubber surface, site-specific documentation must be provided to verify that ASTM F1292 requirements are met.

Foster language development actively.

- Talk with infants and toddlers throughout the day using language that is meaningful to children.
- Engage in purposeful conversation about what is happening and what you and children are doing together.
- Use specific words for actions and objects as you talk with children.
- Engage in many turn-taking conversations with infants and toddlers, as well as older children, by repeating, expanding on, and adding more words to children's attempts to communicate.
- Ask questions about what children are doing as you narrate their actions. "Are you rolling the ball? Roll the ball to me! Your ball rolled over to me. I will roll the ball back to you."

Bring books to non-mobile infants.

- Encourage active use of books and make books easily accessible. You may have a wide selection of books; however, infants must be able to reach and access them.
- Bring a variety of books to infants and invite lap reading and talking about books.
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Supervise actively during napping.

- Sleeping infants must be in constant view of the staff and be visually checked regularly.
- Napping toddlers must be within sight and hearing of at least one supervising adult.

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Ensure non-toxic, safe art materials.

- Glitter is an inappropriate art material because sharp particles may cause eye injury if children rub their eyes or if particles are ingested.
- Foam pieces, packing “peanuts,” and other small items are choking hazards.
- Shaving cream is toxic and labeled “Keep out of reach of children.”

Music materials must be accessible including to non-mobile children for much of the day.

- Alternative activities must be available for children during group music activities.
- Music should not be left on throughout the day. When recorded music is used, it must be used within limited times for a positive purpose and turned off at the end of the activity.

Make blocks and accessories accessible to children 12 months and older.

- Interlocking blocks (whether large or small) and very small blocks are considered under Item 16.
- See ITERS-R, page 40, for a complete list of appropriate blocks. Fine motor materials are not counted as blocks.
- Block accessories include appropriately-sized toys that can be used with blocks to extend block play, such as small vehicles, people, and animals. Accessories must be placed near the blocks so that children know they are meant to be used with blocks.

Provide nature/science experiences.

- Children should have opportunities to experience the natural world daily, either indoors or outdoors. This can occur by taking children outside to experience living things such as trees, grass, and birds, and by providing experiences with nature indoors, with living plants, an aquarium, or pets.

Know the limits for TV, videos, computers, and other media for infants and toddlers.

- No media (i.e., cell phones, I-pads, computers, television, or video) is allowable for children under the age of two. No media screen time is allowed during meals/snacks.
- Media screen time is limited for children 2 years and older to a maximum of 30 minutes total, once a week.
- Computer use time for children 2 years and older should be limited to no more than 15 minutes per day with the exception of children with disabilities who require assistive computer technology.

References:

Harms, T., Cryer, D. & Clifford, R., (2006). *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition*, New York: Teachers College Press.

Cryer, D., Harms, T., & Riley, C. (2004). *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition*, Lewisville, NC: Kaplan Early Learning Company.

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