

INFANT/TODDLER ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE - Revised Edition (ITERS-R)

Statements of Developmentally Appropriate Practice for items included on the Tennessee Child Care Evaluation Program

Space and Furnishings

1. Indoor Space

Children need sufficient space that is well lit and has a comfortable temperature for learning and playing. Indoor space that is well maintained and in good repair sends a message to the young child that is welcoming and inviting.

2. Furnishings for routine care and play

Furnishings should be provided for use by both children and adults.

Routine care furnishings (for meals, sleeping, diapering, and storage of children's possessions) should be comfortable, supportive and appropriate to the size of the child. This allows them to focus on developing self-help skills like feeding, rather than being hindered by discomfort and instability. Furnishings for play (blankets, exersaucers for non-mobile children, or chairs/tables, play furniture for toddlers) need to be easily accessed and used by all children in order to encourage exploration and independence. Furnishings used to store play materials (i.e., shelves, baskets, etc) should be on children's level to promote self-help skills and independence of choice. All furnishings for routine care and play must be safe for children's use, therefore they need to be sturdy and in good repair.

Adults working with children need easy access to routine and play furnishings, as well as storage facilities. This convenience allows adults to maintain proper supervision and to provide smooth transitions between activities. Seating for adults should be used when assisting children with routine care needs. Adult seating may vary according to children's needs, but should provide comfort for the health and well being of caregivers.

3. Provision for relaxation and comfort

Soft furnishings and toys allow children opportunities for daily relaxation and comfort. Cozy areas provide a place for quiet activities to occur and should be protected from active play so children can snuggle, daydream, and lounge. The designated area should be away from active play areas and be protected by caregivers.

4. Room arrangement

Space that is arranged to promote safe care means that all children can be observed at all times without being hidden from view by furniture or other obstructions. Quiet and active play spaces should be separated, but still allow free movement from one activity to another, to encourage exploration and self-choice. Independence is also encouraged when materials are placed so that children can access them easily.

5. Display for children

Colorful pictures and mobiles promote visual stimulation and active learning. They should be displayed at child eye-level. Play items should be placed within easy reach of the children. Pictures, created by the children, should be talked about by the caregiver and should be displayed in order to promote feelings of positive self-esteem. This sends a message to the child that his/her work is valued and appreciated.

Personal Care Routines

6. Greeting/Departing

Parents and children need a warm, welcoming, and pleasant atmosphere to make the daily greeting and departing routine a happy one. Positive greetings help to promote the children's self-esteem and create a welcoming environment for parents. Parents should enter the classroom with their child and should be able to move around the room freely. Caregivers should be sensitive to separation anxiety by parents and children alike. The child's daily schedule should be made available to the parents.

7. Meals/Snacks

Meals and snacks that follow USDA guidelines contribute to the health of children and provide a model for good nutritional habits for life-long practice. Proper hand washing and careful food preparation both teach children proper hygiene and promote sanitary conditions. Children's safety is a concern during mealtimes. Precautions should include posting of food allergies and making necessary food substitutions. In addition, children need to be carefully supervised while eating or held while taking bottles. Mealtimes should be relaxed and scheduled to meet children's individual needs.

8. Nap

Naptime should be scheduled to suit the individual needs of children. Each child should have his/her own crib/mat separated from others to help prevent the spread of germs. Caregivers should stay alert to handle potential problems that arise and to help provide a peaceful rest/nap time for young children.

9. Diapering/Toileting

Young children need appropriate supervision of the toileting process in order to care for basic needs and to teach the importance of good health habits. As children are ready, parents and caregivers should work together to introduce toileting practices that encourage positive self-concept and self-esteem. The schedule should be individualized. Provisions, such as soap and steps near the sink, should be convenient and accessible so that children can wash hands or have their hands washed after toileting; this promotes self-help skills and good personal hygiene. Diapering should always be managed in a manner that promotes safety and good health practices.

10. Health practices

When caring for young children, caregivers must take action to prevent potential health problems and promote positive health habits. Since young children are especially vulnerable to illnesses, caregivers should be alert to handle children's health needs. Medicines should be administered appropriately. Preventative measures should be practiced with consistency. Prevention includes properly washing hands after handling pets, wiping noses, etc. The spread of germs should be minimized by providing children with clean toys, contaminate free sandboxes, and clean classroom surfaces. Protecting children's health includes taking appropriate actions to remove sick children from contact with others. Children should be provided with a change of clothes if needed due to accidents, weather conditions, or messy play.

Caregivers are great role models for promoting positive health habits. They are a valuable resource in educating young children about life-long health practices that prevent illness and promote good health. Caregivers should model and encourage self-help skills through activities where children are actively involved and encouraged to be interested in learning personal hygiene.

11. Safety practice

Protecting children is critical in providing quality care, whether through adequate supervision or minimizing hazards both inside and outside. Caregivers should anticipate potential safety problems and demonstrate, model, and teach children safe practices.

Listening and Talking

12. Helping children understand language

The importance of exposing children to language, even very young children, cannot be emphasized enough. Children's early language experiences influence many areas of their development. Language is best understood when modeled by caregivers who are attentive and talk to children in a warm, supportive manner. Children need to be talked to frequently with simple, exact words. Children learn language within meaningful contexts where adults name objects and describe what children are doing and feeling.

13. Helping children use language

Children, as well as adults, use language to communicate their needs. Children's initial use of language is often expressed in their cries and sounds. As children grow in their understanding of language, their language becomes more distinguishable as words and phrases. When adults show interest in understanding what the child is trying to communicate, language is encouraged because the child learns their voice is heard and has meaning. This "give and take" is an early form of turn taking in communication. Children feel valued when adults respond in a positive, timely manner to their use of language. Adults also become language models by describing their own actions, introducing children to new words, and asking children questions.

14. Using books

The use of books and pictures with infants and toddlers is an important means of language learning for children as they make sense of the world around them. Books and pictures should be available in sufficient number for both independent use and use by a caregiver with the children. Early experiences with books, such as when caregivers are involved and interact warmly with children, encourage continued interest in literacy. Literacy is further encouraged when books are kept in good repair, thus sending the message that books are a valued resource. Children should be allowed to choose from a wide variety of age-appropriate books. The use of sturdy vinyl, cloth, or hard page books make them easier for children to explore independently.

Activities

15. Fine motor

Infants and toddlers need a variety of age-appropriate toys and materials that they can manipulate and play with at will. Materials should be in good repair, organized for play, and stimulate children at different skill levels. These activities strengthen fine motor control while encouraging and reinforcing skill development that contributes to academic readiness.

16. Active physical play

Young children need ample opportunity to exercise their gross motor skills. Opportunities for active play should be available both indoors and outdoors. Age-appropriate equipment and materials should present interesting and challenging options and should be supervised by attentive caregivers.

17. Art

Young children benefit from exposure to child-initiated art activities that are open-ended and process oriented. Children's art should be respected and appreciated as individual creative expression. Materials and opportunities to create art projects at a beginning level should be available as children are developmentally ready for them.

18. Music and movement

Music and movement are valuable means of learning and expression. Children's educational and developmental needs are better met when recorded music is used purposefully. Children need supportive caregivers that encourage self-expression and free choice in music and movement experiences.

19. Blocks

Block play, with a variety of blocks and accessories, allows young children the opportunity to explore spatial, mathematical, and role-play possibilities. Block play requires sufficient space in a protected area and time to expand on concepts and ideas.

20. Dramatic play

Dramatic play gives children opportunity to discover an array of roles and responsibilities as well as providing a vehicle through which they make sense of their world. Space, time, props, materials, and supportive caregivers enhance dramatic play.

21. Sand and water play

Sand and water play gives young children the opportunity to learn concepts through active exploration with their senses. The learning potential is extended when a variety of toys and different activities are used with sensory play.

22. Nature/ science

Even young children can appreciate the wonders of the natural world. Children need experiences with natural things both indoors and outdoors. Children benefit from hands-on experiences with the weather, natural objects, living things, etc. Realistic portrayals of nature in books, pictures, and toys enhance children's understanding of their world.

23. Use of TV, video, and/ or computer

Since children benefit more from hands-on experiences, the use of television, video, or computers is not recommended for infants and should be limited if used with toddlers. Children's experiences are enhanced when caregivers are involved in viewing and limit materials to those that are appropriate and educational. If media materials are used alternative activities should be available to children.

24. Promoting acceptance of diversity

Children need to learn about similarities and differences and acceptance by exposure to diversity through pictures, books, dolls, and other materials. Activities and classroom interactions are valuable resources as well. Exposure to diversity among peoples encourages respect for others and lessens misunderstandings.

Interaction

25. Supervision of play and learning

Supervision of infants and toddlers means meeting individual needs with a flexible schedule and providing for a variety of play activities. Caregivers should be tuned in to routine needs, but also should recognize the need for a balance of quiet and active experiences. Caregivers should provide and watch over the use of materials that stimulate the senses and interests of children.

26. Peer interaction

Infants and toddlers begin to learn how to interact socially and engage in peer experiences when they are allowed to move freely and encouraged to develop positive peer relationships. Caregivers need to promote early social skills by guiding and reinforcing the positive efforts of children interacting with each other.

27. Staff-child interaction

Caregivers, who are nurturing and responsive, promote the development of mutual respect between children and adults. Children, who trust adults to provide for their physical, psychological, and emotional needs, develop their own sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

28. Discipline

Infants and toddlers, who are nurtured with appropriate expectations and who experience consistency in disciplinary care, receive the first lessons in managing their own behavior and learning self-control. A stimulating environment in which rules are simple, explained, and consistently enforced is key to managing discipline and promoting good behavior.

Program Structure

29. Schedule

Infants and toddlers thrive on a consistent routine that provides a balance of activities designed to meet individual needs and foster physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth. Play activities, basic routines, and transitions provide opportunities for learning and growing.

30. Free play

When children are permitted to select materials and companions, and, as far as possible, manage play independently, they learn to make their own choices, tailoring their learning to their personal needs. When giving opportunities to explore, children will choose to play and learn in the way that is most effective for their own personality by following their interests and working on the skills that they really need to develop. Caregiver intervention should be in response to children's needs, an invitation, or an opportunity to expand play activities.

31. Group play activities

In group-care situations, the focus needs to be on meeting individual needs and guiding children as they interact in small groups. If whole group activities are used, they should be limited to a small number of children, limited in time, and flexible to allow for the individual interests of all children.

32. Provisions for children with disabilities

Meeting the needs of infants and toddlers with disabilities requires knowledge of routine care needs, individual assessments, developmental levels, and the integration of the children in ongoing classroom activities. It also requires the involvement and establishment of a partnership between the parents and staff in setting attainable goals that will assist the child in reaching his/her full potential.