

SCHOOL-AGE CARE ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE (SACERS)

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

SPACE AND FURNISHINGS

1. Indoor space

After being in school all day, school age children need aftercare space that is sufficient and ample for a variety of activities. The space should be clean, comfortable, and in good repair in order for children to feel good about being there.

2. Space for gross motor activities

Children need daily opportunities, both in an outdoor and indoor space, to exercise large muscles, run in open spaces, and exercise gross motor skills. It is best practice to provide a variety of surfaces to allow for different types of activities that promote interaction as children participate in team and group games. This is the best way to encourage older children to become involved in a group.

3. Space for privacy

After being in the academic school setting, in which individuals are one of many, children need places where they can escape from the pressures of group situations. These areas should be accessible, protected from intrusion by others, and should be able to be easily monitored. Activities that are set up for one or two children help to promote positive self-esteem.

4. Room arrangement

School age children feel valued and respected when space and materials are arranged and designed to allow for a wide variety of age appropriate activities that appeal to their interests. Interest centers, in which topical and frequently requested materials are organized and accessible, promote independent use and active involvement. A quiet space set aside for homework communicates to children the value of establishing good study habits.

5. Furnishings for routine care (eating, nap, storage of children's possessions)

Children need appropriate furnishings to meet the demands of their daily schedules. Basic furniture, such as tables and chairs, should be sturdy and appropriate to the size of the children in the group. This allows children to be comfortable, have proper body support, and be able to focus on learning, playing, and routine activities rather than their own discomfort. Children take responsibility for themselves when they can independently store their possessions.

6. Furnishings for learning and recreational activities

Tables and chairs, along with other furnishings, should encourage a variety of learning and recreational activities. These furnishings should promote independent use by young learners. Self-esteem is promoted when a space is designated for display of children's work.

7. Furnishings for relaxation and comfort

Children need space and opportunity to rest and relax. Soft furnishings allow children opportunities for relaxation and comfort. Cozy areas that are clean and inviting send the message that alone time is needed and important for overall development.

8. Furnishings for gross motor activities

Children need age appropriate, stationary and portable equipment to promote a wide variety of skills that exercise large muscles while developing confidence and abilities. Equipment should be sound, sturdy, safe, and accessible to children daily. Equipment designed to promote individual or group play and that is flexible helps to maintain children's interest.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

13. Health practices

Children need a healthy environment and the opportunity to learn about good nutrition and proper health practices. Practicing preventive measures, such as washing hands after handling pets or wiping noses, help to educate children to achieve life-long health practices. Taking appropriate action when children are sick will minimize the spread of germs.

15. Safety practices

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. Emergency phone numbers, regularly practiced evacuation drills, and adequate first aid supplies also aid in protecting the children.

16. Attendance

In order to guarantee safety of the children during the transition between school and aftercare and to adequately maintain the continuity between parents, school, and caregiver, recording attendance is a necessary requirement of the caregiver. Adequate procedures for absentee notification either by the parents, the school, or the aftercare facility should be in place.

17. Departure

A procedure that indicates an authorized adult has picked up a child is required. The adult should enter the facility and use a check out system. In cases where children are bussed home, caregivers should escort children to and from the bus and discuss the importance of safe travel behavior with the children on a regular basis.

18. Meals/snacks

Meals and snacks that follow USDA guidelines promote contribute to the health of children and provide a model for good nutritional habits for life-long practice. Proper hand washing along with careful food preparation teaches children proper hygiene and promotes sanitary conditions. Special dietary restrictions or allergies should be considered.

19. Personal hygiene

Provisions, such as soap, paper towels, and tissues, are essential in maintaining proper hygiene that includes hand washing. Personal hygiene should be used as an educational tool by the caregivers to help children learn about health practices.

ACTIVITIES

20. Arts and crafts

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

21. Music and movement

Music and movement are valuable means of learning. Children need a supportive environment that includes a teacher and a variety of tools to encourage their self-expression through music and related activities.

22. Blocks and construction

Block play, with a variety of blocks and accessories, allows children the opportunity to explore spatial, mathematical, and role-play possibilities as well as practice problem-solving skills. Construction permits the completion of a project from design to finished product.

23. Drama/theater

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 teachers enhance dramatic play and drama productions.

24. Language/reading activities

Books and language materials are important means of learning as children make sense of the world around them. Books and materials should be accessible in sufficient number for independent use in a variety of areas, as well as for use by a teacher with the children.

25. Math/reasoning activities

Math skills are reinforced and supported through active, hands-on methods. When math and reasoning materials are available for play and interaction, children's skills are strengthened.

26. Science/nature activities

Science and nature activities and materials foster curiosity and experimentation that benefit the child through direct experience and application to other areas of learning. Children's understanding of concepts is strengthened through hands-on activities.

27. Cultural awareness

Children need to be exposed to similarities and differences of people in positive ways through books, pictures, toys, materials and interaction. This exposure encourages respect for others and lessens misunderstandings. Children also need to see their particular culture reflected in their care settings. This encourages self-esteem and a feeling of belonging.

INTERACTIONS

28. Greeting and departing

Children need a warm, welcoming, and pleasant atmosphere to make the daily greeting and departing routine a happy one. Kindergarteners and first graders need special consideration for their safety as they transition from classrooms to aftercare. Although older, school age children are more independent, they still need to feel welcome and an active part of their aftercare program.

29. Staff-child interactions

Caregivers, who are consistent and responsive, promote the development of mutual respect between school-agers and adults. Quality caregivers involve children in the selection and development of projects and ongoing learning opportunities.

30. Staff-child communication

A balance of listening to and involving a child in conversation sends a message of interest and concern about the child as an individual. School age children need to feel that their ideas matter and their questions will be answered.

31. Staff supervision of children

It is important for teachers to provide a safe environment and age-appropriate supervision for the children that allow for the development of responsible behavior. Quality supervision of school age children supports children's risk-taking behavior within safe boundaries, extends their play activities, and shows appreciation for their efforts and accomplishments.

32. Discipline (Take a look at this first sentence)

When children are bored, punished for bad behavior, or given external rewards for good behavior, they lack the motivation and guidance for exhibiting appropriate behavior. Caregivers should involve the children in establishing rules for behavior and utilize practices of non-punitive discipline, such as redirection, consistent consequences, and conflict resolution.

33. Peer interaction

School age children need many opportunities for developing social skills, such as working together on a group project or playing on opposing teams. Quality caregivers should intervene promptly when children engage in antisocial behavior and should provide timely coaching in the development of social skills for children who are taunted and rejected by peers.

34. Interaction between staff and parents

Though perhaps not as visible or involved as in preschool programs, parents of children in school age care must feel welcome in the program and important to the success of their child's experience. Regularly scheduled conferences allow for exchange of information and building of a partnership between parents and staff.

35. Staff interaction

Whether in a small group, or a large school age program, staff members need to cooperate, communicate, and focus on caring for the children. School age children must feel they are treated fairly and consistently, and that staff do not play favorites. Planning time allows staff to share ideas and work together to divide duties and practice problem solving.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

37. Schedule

Children thrive on having a consistent routine that provides a balance of activities designed to meet individual needs and fosters physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth. Best practice promotes a schedule that meets the needs of different age groups, provides smooth transitions between activities, and occasionally provides field trips to enhance learning experiences.

38. Free choice

When children are permitted to select materials and companions, and, as far as possible, manage play independently, they practice making decisions and having control of their world. A variety of play materials that respond to the interests of the children encourages development and extension of creative play.

40. Use of community resources

School age children are interested and curious about their community and world. Expanding their experiences outside the everyday environment increases cultural awareness and recreational opportunities; however, careful planning and safety considerations are important for successful experiences.

44. Provisions for exceptional children

In meeting the needs of exceptional children, care providers must be aware of routine care needs, individual assessments, necessary modifications to the schedule or environment, and available resources to assist in planning and programming. Exceptional school age children should feel successful and accepted in their aftercare environment.