

Environmental Rating Scales (ERS) – FAQs

What does it mean to have an Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) observation?

The ERS observation will use one of three versions of the ERS tool, depending on whether you are a center-based child care provider for preschool aged children (ECERS-R), center-based child care provider for infants and toddlers (ITERS-R), or a family child care provider (FCCRS).

The Environment Rating Scales (ERS) are made up of seven subscales which focus on different aspects of the classroom or home environment, including Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Listening and Talking, Activities, Interaction, Program Structure, and Parents and Staff. For the purposes of the Parent Aware Rating Tool, the Parents and Staff subscale will not be collected. Information collected from these subscales is used to provide an overview of program quality, and to assign a score representing the quality of the program's environment. The quality rating score is based on a seven point scoring system. A rating scale score of 1 is considered representative of inadequate care, 3 minimal care, 5 good care, and 7 excellent care.

All observations occur during the morning, and are typically scheduled from 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Observations will be scheduled either through the director or the family child care provider, and confirmed by the observer prior to the day of the observation.

The observer does not interact directly with you or the children, but simply observes how a typical morning progresses in your center or home. The observer will follow you as you transition throughout your home or classroom. The observer will also be doing things like counting the number of children's books you have available, looking through toys, observing diapering and meal preparation routines, etc. In addition, the observer may need to ask you several questions at the end of the observation. Please plan to allow up to 15 minutes for this.

How many times will I be observed?

You will be observed one time for each year you participate in the program. The pilot program lasts for three years, so depending upon when you enter, you will be observed up to three times over the course of the three years. For large child care center, classrooms are chosen randomly, so the same classroom may not be observed the second and third year, as was observed the first year.

Is the observation a required part of my involvement in the Parent Aware rating process?

Yes. The Environmental Rating Scale observation is a key component of determining the level of quality in child care settings. In addition, the observation process provides centers and child care homes with essential information regarding their strengths, and recommendations for areas that could be improved.

Will I get the results of the observation?

Yes, you will receive detailed feedback on the results of the ERS observation in written format. Your Parent Aware Resource Specialist will also discuss the results of the observation with you. In addition, you will be provided with a copy of an “All About the ECERS” or “All About the ITERS” book (at corresponding sites), which will provide very detailed information on the observation tools. These books will assist you in fully understanding the results of your observation and provide additional information that can be applied toward program improvement planning.

Who will conduct the observation?

The observations will be conducted by staff from the Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) at the University of Minnesota. These staff members have backgrounds and experiences in early care and education and who have been thoroughly trained in how to observe using the ERS. They have been trained to the highest standards of reliability in the field, which will ensure that they will conduct the observations in the same way each time. Their role is to serve as an independent observer and to adhere to professional standards and ethics for conducting observations.