

## **An Orientation to the Environment Rating Scales**

### Video Transcript

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Welcome! My name is Tracy Gagnon and I'm the IdahoSTARS Assessment Specialist. My job here is to lead a team of assessors using the Environment Rating Scales. We're so excited that you've decided to do this video orientation and during this orientation you will learn about the Environment Rating Scales, the assessment process, and how that all fits into the QRIS or Quality Rating and Improvement System. Never forget that we're here to support you in the wonderful and important work that you do with children. So, let's get started!!

This orientation is designed to introduce you to the Environment Rating Scales. You will learn about the scales themselves, the assessment process, reporting, and how the information you gain from the assessment may be used to improve the quality of child care you provide in your program.

You may or may not be enrolled in the Idaho STARS Quality Rating and Improvement System. We encourage you to enroll. But regardless the Environment Rating Scales can be very valuable in your program.

The scales are used in the Quality Rating and Improvement System and used in everyday practice, to create quality environments in homes and classrooms.

What are the Environment Rating Scales? All 4 Environment Rating Scales are comprehensive, reliable, and valid instruments. What does this mean? Comprehensive means that the scale addresses all settings and ages of children. Reliable means that no matter where an assessment is conducted or who the assessor is, the results are consistent, or about the same. Valid means that the scales have been tested with a battery of tests over the course of many years, and are proven to be accurate and fair. The scales assess program quality and take a realistic look at what is happening in a child care center, family home, or group home.

Why are the scales important? The assessment can help you understand what quality care you are already providing as well as where and how you can improve. The assessment is a snapshot of what the assessor sees during the time of the visit. A third person look at the classroom at one point in time.

Besides being used in the QRIS, the Environment Rating Scales can be used every day in your program to encourage and measure best practice. It is great as a classroom set up book and as an orientation for new staff to understand what needs to happen in the classroom.

The Environment Rating Scales can also help be a book of great ideas, plan for working with a mentor/coach, plan improvements, train helpers and new staff, talk to parents about quality, review performance and set goals, and help you grow as a child care professional.

Each scale is designed with a specific age group in mind. The scale reflects what that particular age group needs. When an assessment is conducted on a classroom the ages of all children in the classroom are considered.

o Family child care homes have a scale that is designed specifically for family child care centers. The FCCERS-R, or Family Child Care Environment

Rating Scale, is designed to be used with children from birth - 12 years old in a family child care or group home.

- o The ITERS-R, or Infant /Toddler Environment Rating Scale, is designed to be used with children from birth - 30 months old.
- o The ECERS-R, or Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, is designed to be used with children from 2 ½ - 5 years old.
- o The SACERS is the School Age Care Environment Rating Scale. It is designed to be used with children from 5 - 12 years old.

Each scale is divided into 7 smaller sections called subscales. These are the specific areas that the scales assess. Sometimes the areas are named differently in different scales, but the general areas are the same in all four scales. These 7 subscales cover all areas of the environment that can be observed or reported in a classroom or family group home. Detailed notes about each of these subscales can be found in the Orientation notes on the Idaho STARS website.

How are the scales scored? Environment Rating Scale scores move from 1 (inadequate) through 7 (excellent). The seven subscales are averaged to calculate a final score. The score of each item that the assessor sees will be rated on a scale of 1 to 7, depending on what the assessor observes. Scores are based on the current situation that is observed or reported by staff, not on future plans.

Environment Rating Scale assessors. An ERS assessor is a highly trained environment quality observer who will visit your center or home and complete the Environment Rating Scale that applies to your setting. Assessors must maintain a high level of reliability.

Who are these assessors? They are Idaho STARS contractors who conduct assessments around the state. These assessors have been to trainings, conferences, and team meetings to ensure they are well trained on all the scales. Assessors are regularly assessed themselves to ensure a high level of reliability.

You're probably wondering how the assessment takes place in your program. These are the steps:

1. The first step is this orientation you are taking right now.
2. Next you complete the online review that you'll learn about at the end of the orientation. A 10 question quiz to assess what you've learned.
3. Next, the assessor calls.
4. The assessor conducts the assessment and interviews.
5. The assessor may call again to follow up.
6. The Regional Consultant delivers the report.
7. The report is used in goal setting and improvement planning.

The assessor will call before the assessment. During the call you will, set up a two week window for the assessment and choose 2 blackout dates within those two weeks.

Select your blackout dates carefully. These are the days you do not want the assessor to come. These can be days when you have a field trip, a small amount of children, or it's just a crazy day. Whatever days you feel will not work for you. Be prepared for the assessor to arrive any other time in this 2 week window you selected.

The assessor will ask: what time most of your children arrive in the morning, the number of children with identified disabilities in the group, the number of children enrolled and their ages, and the birthdates of the youngest and oldest children enrolled. The assessor asks for this information for each classroom that is being assessed, and to identify your facility and the children in the program being observed. This information will be used in the report writing. This is also important to ensure that the right scale is being used with the right group.

To make the assessment fair observations need to be on a typical day. Of course we realize that no day is a "typical day" in child care. Life unfolds differently every day. But, for the purpose of the assessment "typical" means a day when the usual routine and the usual teachers are present. Try to avoid a day with special activities, special guests, or different teachers. The assessor will not stay to conduct the assessment if it is not a typical day. The assessor will have to reschedule with you.

In addition to being a typical day, other conditions must be met for an assessment to be valid. More than half of the children enrolled must be in attendance on the day of the assessment. If 10 children are enrolled, 6 or more must be present. Again, this is so the assessors can observe a typical day.

Another condition for a valid assessment is a condition that applies only to a family or group home, where there are many mixed ages. This is, if an infant is enrolled, the infant must be present during the observation. An infant is a child birth to 11 months old.

How will the assessor know which scale to use, especially if the classroom in the center has a mixed age group? That will depend on the ages of the children. If the majority of the children are under 30 months the ITERS-R, or Infant/ Toddler Environment Rating Scale, will be used, as it is used for children that are birth to 30 months old. If the majority of the children are older than 30 months, the ECERS-R, or Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, will be used, as it is used for children that are 2 ½ to 5 years old. Family child care and school age programs have scales designed specifically for them.

On the day of the assessment the assessor will arrive at the time that was agreed on in the phone call. This time will be when the children arrive or shortly before. This time is necessary in order to see greetings as well as most of the routines of the day. The assessor will greet you and give you a brief rundown of the day. The assessor will remain as much in the background as possible while conducting the assessment. If a child wants to speak or play with the assessor, they will be politely redirected back to the teacher or activity.

The observation can be anywhere from 4 to 6 hours long, depending on the size of the program or group, and the areas and activities the assessor needs to see. The 30 to 45 minute interview after the observation is best done when you are not directly caring for children. This makes it easier for you to concentrate on the questions and answers, and ensure that scoring is fair and accurate. However, the assessor will work around your schedule. At this time the assessor can find out additional information about what was not observed during the assessment. You will also have the opportunity to share additional information you would like the assessor to know about your program.

The assessor will go outside and to any other areas the children go. The assessor will remain in the background, taking notes and observing all areas of the children and environment. The assessor will not be able to tell you your score or provide feedback at the time of the assessment.

About 3 weeks after the assessment you will receive a Classroom Summary Report, for each classroom that received an assessment. Your Regional Quality Child Care Consultant will deliver the report. This detailed report includes a score for every item on the scale. There are 38-49 items on each scale, so the report is long. The report can be a blueprint for specific improvements, as well as a way to help you identify challenges. A sample Classroom Summary Report can be downloaded from the IdahoSTARS website.

The report will identify strengths and areas needing improvement. It can be used to set goals and create an action plan. Mentor/coaches are available to help you through the process both before, during, and after the assessment.

What's in the report? The report consists of 5 sections.

1. A general description of the classroom and special circumstances. This tells about the general look and feel of the classroom, as well as any special circumstances you report.
2. Strengths. These are items that are scored as a 5, 6, or 7 (good to excellent).
3. Not Applicable. These are items that are not included in the overall score because they were not observed.
4. Parents and Staff. This is scored through the interview process.
5. Needs Improvement. These are items that are scored as a 1, 2, 3 or 4. These are areas that may be a focus of improvement planning.

Remember, when reviewing the report, keep in mind that no program will score high in all areas. It is the average total score, not any single item that indicates quality.

The list of items under Needs Improvement can quickly move to strengths with small changes in practice. Sometimes these small changes are just a matter of knowing what you need to change and making small adjustments to what you already do.

What does the Classroom Summary Report look like? Sometimes it can be hard to understand why and how an item scored a certain way. This is just to give you a general idea of what this looks like. These are examples of a comment in the Strengths section. On the left is the item, which in this case is a #23, Sand and Water. In the middle is the score, which in this case is a 6. On the right is an explanation of why the item scored that way.

This is an example of a comment in the Needs Improvement section. On the left is the item, which in this case is a #1, Indoor Space. In the middle is the score, which in this case is a 4. On the right is an explanation of why the item scored that way.

Why is it written that way? You might notice that the language in the examples seems a little distant. Why? The Classroom Summary Reports are written using neutral language. Neutral language means that the assessors record only what they see. They will not use opinions or judgments in their report writing. Neutral language makes everyone involved feel as though the

focus is on the assessment, the process, and the steps that come after, such as program improvement. Assessors are taught to use neutral language in their report writing.

These are the All About books, the assessor's guidebooks. These massive reference guides include detailed descriptions and pictures about each item on the scales. They are designed to answer any questions that an assessor might have when scoring the scales. The books are available for checkout through your local lending library. They are also available for online purchase.

So, you've learned a lot about how assessments can be used in your facility. Now we are going to learn about how assessments fit into the QRIS, or Quality Rating and Improvement System.

The QRIS has 8 quality standards, and environment is one of them. The scales are used to measure the quality of the environment.

For the QRIS, a facility will have 50% of the classrooms assessed. If there are 6 rooms in the facility, 3 will be assessed. If there are 10 rooms, 5 will be assessed. Each of the age groups need to be represented to give a complete picture of the center.

Because we know that quality environment is so important to the development of children, all classrooms must meet a score of at least a 3.0 in order to continue with the QRIS process. So, if any of your classrooms do not meet a score of 3.0, I, Tracy Gagnon, the Assessment Specialist, will call you to work on a technical assistance plan which we like to call First Things First.

I will call you to set up a time. I will work with you to manage the areas that need improvement, such as health and safety. I am also available for site visits, report reviews, and other technical assistance with the scales.

Together we will come up with a written plan for improvement. Every classroom must score a 3.0 or above to continue on in the Quality Rating and Improvement System. After you work on the improvement plan, another assessment will be conducted to ensure that the program has improved.

We will work together to set goals for improvement. I am here to work with you to identify your needs and request funding, if needed, to make those improvements happen. We also encourage you to use a mentor/coach. They are here and eager to help you.

This video is a brief overview of assessment and the Environment Rating Scales. How can you learn more about the ERS? There is training on each individual scale that is available through Idaho STARS. This will not make you an assessor, but will help you conduct self studies and educate staff and parents about quality environments.

These scales have a very specific way of being scored. When you first look at them they can be a bit baffling. That's why it's important to take this extra training on the Environment Rating Scales and work with a mentor/coach. This will help you be fully prepared for an assessment.

That extra training consists of a self-paced video and a workbook. These are available for checkout through your Child Care Resource and Referral office. It explains more about the background on the scales, provides practice

scoring with video clips, and includes homework scoring the scales in an actual classroom. When you have completed this training you will get 5 hours of Idaho STARS approved training.

We refer a lot to scores in this video. The real message behind the scales is recognizing and improving quality, and we are here to help you every step of the way! But do scores really matter? They do matter - for research and for a point total that factors into the Quality Rating and Improvement System. The Environment Rating Scales and the scores help you by crediting your current practices, what you are already doing, and helping provide a roadmap to increasing your quality.

We're almost finished with the video. Here's how you can learn more about assessments:

- o Take the Idaho STARS approved in-depth Environment Rating Scale trainings
- o Talk with other providers about their experience with the FCCERS, ITERS, ECERS, and SACERS
- o Review the scale that applies to your center or family group home
- o Conduct a self assessment

Other ideas include:

- o Talking with your local regional consultant
- o Requesting an Idaho STARS mentor/coach who can walk you through the scales and the assessment process
- o There are notes on each of the four Environment Rating Scales. These notes help to further explain what is being looked at in the individual sections. These can help you understand what the focus will be on when the assessor conducts the assessment, as well as to help you make improvements
- o There are several other guidelines and tools the assessors use as they look at a facility. These include the Consumer Product Safety Commission Playground guidelines, the USDA meal and nutrition guidelines, as well as national standards for diapering, hand washing, and table washing. These can be found on the Idaho STARS website.

Where do I go from here, you ask?

- o Take the review at Survey Monkey that is listed on the last slide
- o Take the in-depth training on the Environment Rating Scales
- o Encourage your staff to take the training too. Staff should take the training that corresponds to their classroom or family group home. This will help everyone become involved in the process
- o Submit your QRIS Letter of Intent if you would like to enroll in the Quality Rating and Improvement System. If you are not enrolled in the QRIS, and want an assessment or have questions about the scales, contact the Idaho STARS Assessment Specialist.

You made it! Give yourself a great big pat on the back! I've been using these scales for years and have seen the positive feelings and wonderful difference they can make. Thank you for taking this journey with us. Call or email me, Tracy Gagnon, the Idaho STARS Assessment Specialist, if you have any questions.

Click on the link that says "Environment Rating Scale Review" to complete the 10 question review. Once you've submitted the review we'll know you've watched the orientation. We'll contact you as you indicate.

Again, thank you so much for working so hard to create the best possible environment for children in your care!!!!!!