

ECERS-3: Clarifications about Accessibility

ACCESSIBILITY

The information below supports content from the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Third Edition (ECERS-3). This information may be shared by coaches with programs.

Question: Can you explain accessibility?

Answer: The term “accessible” means that children can reach and use materials, furnishings, and equipment (p. 10). For children with special needs, ECERS-3 recommends providing individual modifications in room arrangement and schedule to allow for active participation in classroom activities.

Items that relate to accessibility are listed below:

| Twenty-five-minute Accessibility Required | | One-hour Accessibility Required | |
|---|-------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| *For program less than three hours, pro-rate the times accordingly. | | | |
| Item #2 | 3.4 and 5.4 | | |
| Item #3 | 3.2 | | |
| Item #4 | 5.1 | Item #4 | 5.2 |
| Item #15 | 1.1 and 3.1 | Item #15 | 5.1 and 7.1 |
| Item #17 | 3.1, 3.4, and 5.1 | Item #17 | 5.2 |
| Item #18 | 3.1 | Item #18 | 5.1 |
| Item #19 | 3.1 | Item #19 | 5.1 |
| Item #20 | 3.1 and 7.1 | Item #20 | 5.4 |
| Item #21 | 3.1 and 5.1 | Item #21 | 5.2 |
| Item #22 | 3.1 and 3.3 | Item #22 | 5.1 |
| Item #23 | 3.1 | Item #23 | 5.1 |
| Item #25 | 3.2, 5.1, and 7.1 | Item #25 | 5.2 and 7.2 |
| | | Item #26 | 5.1 and 5.2 |
| Item #29 | 3.2 | Item #29 | 5.1 |
| Item #34 | 1.1 and 3.1 | Item #34 | 5.1 |

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Question: Can you explain whether the time for free play needs to be provided all at once, or can the hour of time take place in segments for materials to be considered accessible?

Answer: For ECERS-3, children need accessibility to free play at interest areas/interest centers for at least 60 minutes during the three-hour observation. The 60 minutes do not need to be consecutive; however, posted schedules or time outside of the three-hour observation is not considered. If snack is offered during free play time, 10 minutes is deducted from the overall free play time. See page 10 for other considerations that may influence accessibility time, such as staff telling children an area is “closed,” assigning children to classroom areas, or asking children to clean up.

Question: When snack is offered as a center choice, how much time is deducted from accessibility?

Answer: When snack is offered as a center choice during free play time, 10 minutes is deducted from the total amount of time toys, materials, and equipment are accessible to children.

Question: Can you clarify how you measure the amount of time for accessibility during indoor gross-motor play?

Answer: The Notes for Clarification state, “When considering the time children are given to use equipment, a small absence from access is not considered, such as when a child needs to leave the area to use the toilet or to get a drink of water. However, children should not have to spend long periods without access. For example, if a small group of children is taken to use the toilet and this takes up a substantial amount of the time required to access materials, do not give credit, even if other children are able to have access for the full time.”

Question: If a child falls asleep in the cozy area or another play area for an extended period of time during free play, are teachers required to wake the child up to make the area accessible to other children?

Answer: When a child falls asleep, it will not affect ECERS-3 unless the child who falls asleep blocks accessibility for other children. A privacy area, when used exclusively for that purpose, may have up to two children. A cozy area may be used for two or three children, as long as it is not also used as the privacy area (limit of two). Therefore, one child sleeping should not preclude other children’s access.

Some children are not easily wakened, so sensitivity to the individual situation and child is key. Staff can discuss individual needs with families to ensure mutual understanding and support. For example, families should be informed when a child falls asleep outside of napping time. Staff can ask for input (e.g., do families want the child to be woken gently?).

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In center areas, when a child blocks access, he/she should be gently woken or moved and the situation discussed with the family. In the cozy area, it makes sense a child might fall asleep. As long as other children can still use the area for reading or relaxing, it is okay.

Question: What if a child sleeps longer after naptime and other children are playing. How does this impact accessibility?

Answer: At times, some children may sleep longer than others. The notes on page 10 of the ECERS-3 book address accessibility. “For materials to be considered accessible does not mean that every child must have access during all of the time required, but that each child who wishes should have a reasonable chance to use the materials.”

When children are waking up, they should have a choice of resuming playing. If one child decides not to participate and relaxes for a little longer or sleeps longer than other children, this should not affect the program’s accessibility. In this case, “accessibility” would mean that each child who wishes to do so could use materials freely.

Question: If sections of the climbing equipment are permanently blocked off, would that be considered restricting access, or would the program be able to pass outdoor equipment requirements because they made appropriate modifications?

Answer: Yes. We do see programs that block access to some pieces of equipment because of height. There are times that younger children inappropriately are given access to equipment that is manufactured for older children; therefore, the equipment is considered dangerous. In other cases, equipment is hazardous because it does not conform to current safety regulations.

As long as inappropriate/unsafe equipment is physically blocked off, and children are not observed using the equipment, the hazardous equipment is not considered as extremely dangerous for Item 7 at 3.2. In addition to physical boundaries, teachers may tell children verbally that specific pieces of equipment are available or are not available for play to reinforce any restrictions.

Question: Do rolling drawer units work for storage?

Answer: For ECERS-3, children must be able to visually see materials easily in containers and be able to open containers easily to access materials. If drawers are not clear or opaque so that the contents are easily visible, the drawer unit would not be okay. If the unit rolls (due to wheels) such that a child needs assistance, it would not be considered accessible. The items must be low enough so children can see what

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is inside and be able to open the drawers without assistance (p. 10) so that they do not have to wait to use a particular toy or material.

Notes on page 10 in the ECERS-3 book clarify the meaning of “accessible.” Accessible means that children can reach and use the materials without assistance. Can children open the drawers of the units in the photograph independently and easily? To be considered accessible, it must be observed by the assessor that children can reach and access the materials.

The best assurance of accessibility is that items are housed in clear bins on open shelving. For rolling units, it depends on whether the units stay stationary when the children pull on the drawers. Children must be able to open drawers, use items easily without assistance, and be able to retrieve materials easily.

From a practical standpoint, if the items in the drawers are something that children use on a table top, such as fine-motor construction materials, how would the children retrieve and carry small items over to a table or the floor? If musical instruments or dramatic play clothing items are stored, when one drawer is open, can children retrieve items in the drawer beneath it? Would children need assistance closing the drawers before items in other drawers could be reached independently? The purpose is to ensure accessibility. Teachers would need to experiment to see how drawer units work for the children.

Question: May cubbies be located in the hallway?

Answer: We recognize that this is a frequent question for programs that have hook systems secured in hallways, rather than cubby units installed within the classroom. In order to get credit for 7.1 for furnishings, care, play, and learning, cubbies need to be accessible without leaving the room.

References

Harms, T., Clifford, R. M., & Cryer, D. (2014). *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, third edition (ECERS-3)*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

The Environment Rating Scales Institute. (2018, August). *Additional Notes for Clarification for the ECERS-3*. Retrieved from https://www.ersi.info/PDF/NotesforClarification/ECERS-3%20Additional%20Notes_recent.pdf

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