

## **HOW THE ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALES SHOULD BE USED DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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### **Recommendation:**

ERS assessments should be completed, wherever programs are serving children, to help inform us about the pandemic's effect on health and safety, but also on the quality of care and learning for children. This information can guide us on how best to maximize the good and minimize the bad within each program. Without information provided by ERS assessments, we are not able to make intelligent, well-informed decisions under these difficult conditions. We want to keep quality standards high, but recognize that it is not appropriate to use the scores on ERS instruments during the pandemic in high stakes decisions about child care reimbursement rates or on program ratings. ERS assessment scores can and should be used to inform and guide best practices.

### **Rationale:**

During these days of fear and hardship it becomes difficult to make the best decisions to protect health while ensuring that life's necessities can continue as normally as possible. We may ask ourselves whether children should be in child care or not. Both parents and child care professionals are asking such questions. But in all states, some children are attending child care. The staff of these programs must consider how to manage the needs of protecting health while continuing to meet children's developmental needs. The role of the ERS, in examining how well children's wide range of developmental needs are being met, remains relevant and unchanged in the midst of this pandemic.

The ERS were designed to assess a program and provide information from those assessments to determine how to improve the quality of what children experience. At this time, the requirements of health are more demanding than ever but are often in direct conflict with ensuring that children's many other developmental needs are met. ERS observations are necessary to help us see what has happened to the quality of programs as they shift priorities. If programs are open and serving children, we cannot stop completing ERS observations, because then we become blind to what is happening to children in programs. Instead, we should use this time to support programs in meeting global quality indicators to the best of their ability during the pandemic. It is possible to continue some level of monitoring of both health and safety and overall program quality without introducing an undue amount of risk to children and staff of the programs. In fact, failure to monitor is not acceptable when we are charged with protecting children's overall health and safety while providing rich learning environments for them.