

Thinking More about Language and Interactions



SACERS-U

Purpose: This document addresses many of the requirements found in the Language-Reasoning and Interaction subscales. The focus is primarily on indicators at the 3, 5, and 7 level. It is important to review each item entirely to ensure that no indicator at the 1 or “inadequate” level applies to the classroom. Answering the questions and referring to the SACERS-U will build familiarity with requirements, while offering a chance to reflect on current practices and situations.

Preparation: Refer to the SACERS-U (spiral bound edition, published in 2014) when completing the questions. To better understand the scale format and structure, review the instructions for scoring on page 4 in the SACERS-U and the definitions of common terms on pages 5-6. It will also be helpful to refer to a copy of the most current NC Additional Notes (available at ncrlap.org). There are many questions, so completing them all will likely take several reflection/review sessions.

The items included here consider many aspects related to promoting children’s development and building relationships. Responsive interactions for all children, including those with disabilities, is key. There is much focus on staff language and daily interactions with children throughout the day. This includes during various routines, as well as different types of activities, such as those that are social, instructional, planned, and spontaneous. Attention is given to warm and respectful interactions and promoting social skill development. The important work that staff do to supervise and guide children for safety and teaching purposes is recognized.

Tips:

- If you are confused about a question, look at the item in the SACERS-U and check any Notes for Clarification and/or NC Additional Notes to identify the specific indicator and requirement to which it refers.
- Describe the current practices that occur when answering the questions. Remember, this is not about a “right answer” but rather a way to build understanding about what occurs every day.
- Using the worksheet on an ongoing basis can help verify that children experience enriching, positive, and age-appropriate language and interactions. Additionally, this process emphasizes how interactions, social communication, and guidance practices contribute to building positive relationships with all children.
- Answering the questions with someone else (co-teachers, administrators, technical assistance specialists, etc.) promotes sharing of perspectives and may draw attention to different details.

Date(s) completed: _____ Classroom name/age group: _____

Worksheet completed by: _____

ITEM 28 Staff-child interactions (p. 35)

Think about how staff interact with the children, including during positive, challenging, and neutral situations:

Do interactions with children include enthusiasm, affection, and/or appreciation? **Y / N**

Are most, if not all, staff responses supportive and warm? **Y / N**

Is there much smiling and talking throughout the day? **Y / N**

Are most, if not all, staff responses to children fair and respectful? **Y / N**

Are responses to strong emotions sympathetic, even when the feelings occur during challenging behaviors? **Y / N**

Describe a recent example of an interaction that required sympathy/understanding from staff:

Give an example of how mutual respect is promoted between staff and children: _____

Describe how staff promotes independence/autonomy in children's behavior. **Hint:** Consider how children's leadership and planning is encouraged, how child-initiated activities are supported, how staff respond to children's suggestions or ideas.

ITEM 29 Staff-child communication (p. 36)

Do staff-child conversations occur frequently throughout the day? **Y / N**

Do the conversations often include multiple exchanges, beyond a question and single response? **Y / N**

Describe both sides of a recent conversation with a child: _____

Is most of the adult language used for social interaction and to exchange information, rather than giving directions and behavior guidance? **Y / N**

Thinking about the types of questions staff ask children:

Do they encourage conversation? **Y / N** **Hint:** Consider if questions often require longer answers or they are used to learn more about how a child thinks as opposed to primarily gather basic, yes/no information.

Do they encourage brainstorming or problem solving? **Y / N** **Hint:** Consider if “why,” “how,” “what if” questions are used.

List two examples of questions staff have asked that required children to respond with longer, more complex answers: _____

Do adults talk with each child daily? **Y / N**

When children share their ideas, do staff:

Ask questions that foster an interest to discover more about their ideas? **Y / N**

Add relevant information to enhance what the child already knows? **Y / N**

List two recent interactions when staff responded to a child’s ideas by verbally expanding on them:

ITEM 30 Staff supervision of children (p. 37)

Is supervision adjusted based on the needs of children or activities? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe:

Describe a recent positive interaction between staff and children during play:

Describe a recent positive interaction between staff and children during routines:

Are interactions used to extend children's play? **Y / N**

What happens when children are having difficulty becoming engaged or using materials?

Are children's efforts and accomplishments acknowledged? **Y / N** How so?

Does anyone at the program have knowledge of team sports or other special activities who can teach them to the children? **Y / N** If **yes**, list examples: _____

ITEM 31 Discipline (p. 38)

Is there a written discipline policy for the school age program that prohibits harsh discipline? **Y / N** If **yes**, do parents receive a copy? **Y / N**

When establishing expectations, are children's ages and developmental levels considered, with adjustments made as needed? **Y / N**

Describe non-punitive guidance strategies used to address challenging or unwanted behaviors:

If guidance strategies are not effective and the behaviors continue, what happens next? _____

Think about how the classroom is **set up** (e.g., daily schedule, space and arrangement, types of materials) and how these different aspects can impact behaviors.

Is the classroom arranged to reduce interruptions from traffic or noise and provide separation between quiet and active areas? **Y / N**

Are transition strategies used to reduce waiting times? **Y / N** If **yes**, list some strategies used:

Is there a variety of interesting choices in all areas to keep children busy and engaged? **Y / N**

If **no**, list any areas where additional materials could encourage more use of an area or reduce conflict: _____

Are there duplicates of popular materials or a system used to help children with turn-taking? **Y / N**

Is there ample free play time that allows children to develop friendships and have meaningful play experiences? **Y / N**

Is there ample time scheduled for active and energetic play? **Y / N**

Are positive behaviors acknowledged? **Y / N**

Are there outside professionals to help if there is a child with very difficult or unusual behaviors? **Y / N**

If **yes**, list the options that are available: _____

Do staff discuss behavior concerns with parents and make joint decisions about plans and strategies? **Y / N**

If **yes**, provide an example:

ITEM 32 Peer interactions (p. 39)

Are the children given time to play with friends of their choosing? **Y / N**

Consider how staff respond when children are having difficulties getting along:

Do staff help children become aware of other's feelings? **Y / N**

Are children encouraged to talk through their disagreements? **Y / N**

Are problem-solving techniques such as negotiation, self-reflection, and active listening discussed and encouraged? **Y / N**

Think of a recent conflict between children. Describe how staff encouraged appropriate choices and assisted children with solving the problem: _____

How do staff model positive social skills for the children? _____

ITEM 33 Interactions between staff and parents (p. 40)

What types of information are shared with parents? _____

Does this include information about program policies and practice? **Y / N**

Does this include information on topics like community events, recreation, parenting, etc.? **Y / N**

Are there ways the program takes action to welcome and include parents? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe:

Do parent-teacher conferences occur? **Y / N** If **yes**, how often? _____

Are there ways parents can give feedback or help make decisions about the program? **Y / N** If **yes**, how does this occur? _____

ITEM 34 Staff interaction (p. 41)

Only answer these questions if more than one teacher works with the children, either at the same time or at different times during the day; otherwise skip to the next item.

Is there time for staff to communicate about the children and classroom? **Y / N** How often and when does this occur? _____

If multiple staff work together, is there joint planning time? **Y / N**

If **yes**, how often does this occur? _____

Do staff work well together (e.g., good communication, responsibilities and duties shared)? **Y / N** If **yes**, how are decisions made about distributing tasks/responsibilities? _____

Describe ways the program plans activities, social events, or trainings to promote positive staff interaction:

ITEM 35 Communication between program staff and children’s classroom teachers (p. 42)

Answer these questions only if the school-age program is part of the children’s school. If the program is a summer program or a child care center not hosted by the children’s school, skip to the reflection section.

Is there communication between the school-age program staff and the classroom teachers? **Y / N** If **yes**, how often does this occur and what are the most common topics discussed?

Are there opportunities to communicate about (check all that apply):

- Practical concerns or challenges children are having.
- Academic issues
- Social/emotional issues

Does any joint planning for individual children occur? **Y / N**

Reflection for future planning: After completing this worksheet, it can be helpful to go back and think more about the answers. Were there any questions that were answered “no” instead of “yes?” If so, this could help identify areas to work on. It can also be helpful to break bigger topics into smaller steps so that changes and progress can be easily recognized. Hopefully this worksheet was a helpful beginning to an ongoing self-study practice and suggest continuing with an action plan after completing the reflection questions below.

List areas where strengths were noted in language and interactions:

List areas where improvements could be made or there are new ideas to think about:

Are there any issues you will work to change right away? Describe how so:

Are there issues that will take more time to change? What are these and what resources may be needed?

Want to find out more?

Not all SACERS-U indicators are covered in this worksheet, so review the scale carefully and seek out other resources, as needed, since relying on these questions alone to prepare for an assessment will not be sufficient. We encourage you to review other resources found on the ncrlap.org website to stay informed about any updates and continue to build your understanding of the SACERS-U and the assessment process. For example:

- Look for general information about the assessment process and also specific SACERS-U resources. These resources may offer ideas about what to focus on or supplement ideas you were already considering.
- Check out the answers to Frequently Asked Questions or send a new question to ncrlap@uncg.edu.
- Register for free online training webinars. Some are live webinars; others are pre-recorded and offer training credits (contact hours). Call 1-866-362-7527 or register online at ncrlap.org.

When planning for program enhancement, always consider the unique features of the classroom and facility such as ages and abilities of the children enrolled, the number of teachers in the classroom, and overall goals and/or philosophy. Programs may also seek advice from their DCDEE Child Care Consultant, local CCR&R and/or Smart Start Partnerships, or other child care agencies.

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References:

Harms, T., Jacobs, E., & White, D. (2014). School-age care environment rating scale. (Updated edition). New York, NY. Teachers College Press.

NC Additional Notes (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.ncrlap.org>.