



## Environments that Promote Healthy Development



Many children nationwide spend the majority of their day, eat most of their meals, and participate in physical activity with caregivers other than their parents or guardians. This large amount of time spent with child care providers, either at a center or in a family childcare setting, means that these providers play a key role in creating healthy habits that children will continue utilizing throughout their lives. Two important aspects of an environment that promotes healthy development in children are: (1) Sanitation and (2) Nutrition.

The first factor to consider in creating healthy environments is cleanliness. Providers should be making an effort to cut down on the spread of germs in the classroom. Surfaces that can come in contact with germs, such as diapering areas, food prep areas, and eating surfaces should be washed and sanitized using EPA approved materials. Providers should also encourage good handwashing habits which includes having children wash their hands each time they come into the classroom, before and after meals, and after handling bodily fluids (after diapering and wiping noses.) Using songs and charts can give visual and auditory reminders to children of the correct steps to handwashing to fully eliminate dirt and germs.

Another element of creating a healthy environment is nutrition. Healthy eating habits start at a very young age and with the amount of time children spend in childcare, mealtimes in these environments can influence lifelong eating habits. To ensure that children are developing the correct eating habits, consider the following questions. *Am I providing a variety of healthy nutritious meals? Are mealtimes calm and relaxed, allowing children to enjoy their meal and socialize with others? Am I a role model for healthy eating?*

In addition to providing nutritious food, children will look at their caregivers as a guide to creating healthy behaviors. Caregivers should sit with children to model healthy eating habits and facilitate conversations during the meal. Providers should treat mealtimes as additional learning opportunities by encouraging self-help skills as well.

One of the important goals of childcare providers is keeping the children in their care healthy. Teaching proper handwashing, cleaning and sanitizing the environment, and fostering healthy eating habits are a great start to creating not only a healthy environment for the children now, but will also ensure lifelong habits that will help children stay healthy throughout their lives.

Click on the link below for NAEYC's Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting Frequency Table.

[http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/Documents/program-and-policy-support/NAEYC-Cleaning-and-](http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/Documents/program-and-policy-support/NAEYC-Cleaning-and-Disinfecting-Frequency-Table.pdf)

### Beyond the Table

Healthy eating habits can be developed through activities outside of mealtime.

- ◆ Providers can read books about a new type of food (and then serve it at a meal).
- ◆ Children can make collages of healthy food items.
- ◆ Older children can also help prepare different food items. Allowing children to help with food prep will enhance their self-help skills and may encourage them to try the items they helped create.



## Using the Environment Rating Scales Effectively to Improve Quality

Quality in early childhood programs is measured in terms of the impact of the care provided on a child's physical, cognitive and social-emotional development. The environment rating scales (ERS)- ECERS-3, ITERS-R and FCCERS-R, assess quality through several items and indicators which provide information pertaining to key questions such as below:

- ◆ *Is the environment arranged to provide children with enough space, access to material, and comfort?*
- ◆ *Are children's basic needs, pertaining to health and safety, met?*
- ◆ *Is there enough material and time to foster learning for all children in the classroom?*
- ◆ *Are interactions developmentally appropriate and nurturing?*



The first step towards improving quality in any early childhood program is to conduct a baseline assessment of the program using the appropriate rating scale: ECERS-3 for preschool classrooms, ITERS-R for the infant-toddler rooms and FCCERS-R for family childcare. These baseline assessments can provide an overall picture of a program's areas of strength, areas for growth, and act as a starting point for improvements. When looking at the scores on the ERS, the average score for a classroom or care space is more important than the score of individual items on the scale. According to Debby Cryer, one of the 2 developers of the scales, "It is the average total score that is related to positive child development, but not any of the single requirements by themselves. The scales are weighted, through repetition of important requirements, to ensure that the most important things for positive development are more heavily represented than single details." (Cryer, n.d).

For instance, consistent supervision is very important to a child's well-being and safety. The following items in the scale include indicators pertaining to supervision: room arrangement, toileting/diapering, nap, safety practices, supervision of play and learning, free play, transitions and waiting times.

### Tips to plan for improvement

- ◆ Assess areas of strengths and weakness in relation to the subscales in the ERS.
- ◆ Make sure staff and care providers understand the ERS and how and why it is used to measure environment and interactions.
- ◆ Make well informed decisions in terms of which items to take your 1's (low scores).
- ◆ Ensure that indicators that are repeated in several items in the scale are given greater attention.
- ◆ Use the ERS regularly, either in its entirety or one subscale at a time, to assess improvements as they are being made.

Similarly, positive nurturing relationships with adults are important for children's learning and development, and indicators pertaining to staff interaction are present in several items throughout the scales.

It is virtually impossible to score well on every single item in the scales. It is beneficial to focus on the average scores of each subscale instead of worrying about every low scoring item. For instance, a program with a small space may find it difficult to arrange cribs/mats at the prescribed 36" distance from each other. It is likely that the program will score low on items pertaining to this aspect (item 8 of the ITERS-R or the FCCERS-R). In such a situation, extra focus in other aspects of care, such as sanitation practices (handwashing, table washing, diapering/toileting) and interactions with children, will boost scores on the other areas, and ensure that many impactful aspects of development are being met.

Cryer, D. (n.d.) *Understanding the Meaning of the Environment Rating Scale Scores.* Retrieved from [http://www.ersi.info/PDF/Meaning%20of%20Environment%](http://www.ersi.info/PDF/Meaning%20of%20Environment%20Rating%20Scale%20Scores.pdf)



## Q and A with Digna Santos – a GNJK 4-Star Rated Provider in Middlesex County

### 1. What brought you into this field of childcare and what made you stay in it?

The children! Parents are irreplaceable but since they work long hours, they leave their children with me trusting that they will receive appropriate care. When the children are with me during the day, I turn into their everything! I am then their closest relative and their teacher. Knowing that I am a part of their growth and development is the reason I stay.

### 2. Can you share some tips on care space arrangement and providing developmentally appropriate learning experiences for the children in your care?

It is important to take into account the ages, and specific needs and abilities of the children and to be sure that the materials and the space are appropriate to encourage their development and learning. I plan appropriate activities weekly and I provide materials such as books, puzzles, crayons, table games and equipment appropriate to their age. I help to develop their interests and stimulate their curiosity by decorating the classroom with their own works, keeping all of the learning areas open and inviting them to explore and learn and grow in my class. I create a homey atmosphere with natural sounds and nursery rhymes and their own art work hung at their eye level so they can see, value and appreciate their work and that of their classmates. I read them books with large, colorful illustrations appropriate to their age and interests, to promote their young curiosity and interest in learning about the world that surrounds them.



### 3. Connection between home and school is really important. How do you keep families involved in their child's learning and development?

I make sure to integrate the family in their learning through different activities that connect the home and the school. I offer a diverse range of experiences. I create meeting schedules with flexible days and hours, giving the opportunity to each family to participate. I invite the families to our program, to read, cook, sing and participate in small excursions with the children. This allows us to enrich our connection and learn about the culture of each family. I also invite families to programs and resources that are inside and outside our community.

### 4. What made you enroll in GNJK and what suggestions do you have for providers that are currently in the process of improving quality?

My desire to continue educating myself, to offer the children and the families a better program where they can develop their skills and capabilities. My experience is invaluable. I met a professional, Marilyn Quintana, who was not only an instructor and teacher, but also became our partner and spent all the time necessary to satisfy each and every one of our needs. We providers are teachers. We are responsible for the early education of each child; we are the one who strengthens those roots, we have to continue our education to be able to continue educating them. It is not easy but we can do it, and at the end our reward for that hard work will always be the children and knowing that we were part of that growth.



### 5. How do you use the FCCERS-R?

This instrument is very important for the professional development of the providers. It is a guide that allows us to organize ourselves properly and use the spaces and materials appropriately for each child. But the tool does not work by itself; it is up to us, the provider, to put it into practice. Having a guide, an instructor who works with enthusiasm and dedication, like Marilyn, also helps a lot.

# Save the Date for these Upcoming Opportunities!

## Webinars, *Open to all GNJK programs*

Date	Time	Topic	Presenter	Description
2/23/18 <a href="#">Register Here</a>	1pm	“The Purpose of Partnership: It Takes a Village to Achieve Star Rating”	Grow NJ Kids Technical Assistance Center– North East	Join us as we explore the essential role that community engagement plays in the journey to rating. The webinar will clarify the requirements for 3,4 & 5-Star rating under Category 3. Participants will learn helpful tips for recruiting a strong parent partnership group, how to best understand the needs of your community and how to maximize rating points by inviting families to be part of the Grow NJ Kids process.

## GNJK Peer Learning Communities (PLCs), *County Specific*

Date	Time	Location	County
2/13/18	12-2pm	North Bergen Library – Kennedy Branch	<a href="#">Hudson</a>
5/1/18	1-3pm	Child Care Connection, Trenton	<a href="#">Mercer</a>
3/21/18	10am-12pm	Learning Resource Center, East Orange	Essex
2/7/18	1-3pm	VNA Office, Toms River	<a href="#">Ocean</a>
TBD	TBD	JCC Blaustein Early Childhood Center, Bridgewater	Middlesex/Somerset
TBD	TBD	TBD	Monmouth

### Virtual Learning Community

*Open to the Central Region  
(Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean & Somerset Counties)*

Join us from the comfort of your office to discuss GNJK related topics, Continuous Quality Improvement and leadership in the field of Early Care and Education. On the third Wednesday of each month, we will be hosting an on-line forum to reflect on best practices and other topics as requested to meet your needs.

**Online & Phone Accessible**  
Wednesday, February 28, 2018  
1-2pm

[Click to Register](#)

### Networking Meetings: Save the Date

**Central Region**  
Saturday April 21<sup>st</sup>  
Middlesex Fire Academy, Sayreville

**Northeast Region**  
Thursday, May 17<sup>th</sup>  
Learning Resource Center, East Orange



PCA-NJ operates a broad range of preventative services designed to support the improvement and quality of professional workforces and programming, resulting in significant positive impacts on family functioning and health in all 21 counties. **PCA-NJ programs include:**

- ◆ Grow NJ Kids TAC
- ◆ Healthy Families
- ◆ Parents as Teachers
- ◆ Parent Linking Program
- ◆ Enough Abuse
- ◆ Middlesex County Council for Young Children
- ◆ Human Trafficking Prevention
- ◆ Essex Pregnancy & Parenting Connection
- ◆ Parent Education & Technical Assistance
- ◆ The Period of Purple Crying

**Central Region TA Center** 103 Church Street, Suite 210 New Brunswick, NJ 08901 732.246.8060

**Northeast Region TA Center** 550 Broad Street, Suite 1105 Newark, NJ 07102 973.371.5301

<https://www.preventchildabuseNJ.org/growtac>