

Natural Environments Rating Scale

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The Natural Environments Rating Scale is a brief measure designed to summarize and categorize activities that involve the child during Early Intervention (EI) home visits. Ratings are made following viewing of a videotaped visit between a service provider of any discipline (i.e., a home visitor) and the family/child. Videotapes of varied lengths that include activities involving the child may be rated; a minimum videotape length of 10-15 minutes is recommended.

The terms *home* and *home visitor* are used broadly. *Home* is used to mean any natural environment or setting where a child spends time including the home, home of a relative or family friend, home-based child care, child care centers, and neighborhood, recreational, transportation, or other community settings. The term *home visitor* is used broadly to define a professional of any discipline (e.g., physical therapist, early intervention teacher, nutritionist, etc.) who provides service to a family/child in the child's home or other community settings.

The end result of the ratings is to categorize the visits as either *setting-provided* or *participation-based*.

Setting-provided is a term to describe visits that are provided using traditional practices. In a *setting-provided* visit, the home visitor is likely to directly interact with the child, using an activity and materials designed by the home visitor. Generally, these activities relate to an outcome or objective on the child's IFSP and are designed to provide opportunities for the child to learn (i.e., acquire) or practice a particular skill. The home visitor may discuss what is being done or use their interaction with the child to demonstrate for the caregiver. At the end of the visit, the home visitor may provide suggestions for the caregiver about follow-up activities (or "home programs") that the caregiver may use with the child.

Participation-based is a term to describe visits where the child's participation in an activity is being facilitated or where special strategies or techniques are being embedded within a naturally occurring activity. In a *participation-based* visit, the caregiver and the child are interacting together; the home visitor may join that interaction in a collaborative way, but is not the primary person interacting with the child. The activity and materials used are naturally-occurring or selected by the caregiver to represent areas of concern (e.g., participating in story time at the child care program). The home visitor facilitates the activity by verifying/reinforcing what the caregiver is doing or by suggesting and teaching intervention strategies such as adaptations/assistive technology or embedding of specialized teaching/therapy techniques. The end result of a *participation-based* visit is that the caregiver knows and can use strategies that promote the child's participation in naturally-occurring activity(ies) and can use these strategies competently on their own.

Rating Categories and Guidelines:

Setting: Physical location(s) where the visit takes place. Depending on the length of the videotape, one or more settings may be observed.

Activity: An activity that involves the child is the basis of rating with the Scale. Home visits may include a variety of activities that do not directly involve the child such as

discussion between the adults (e.g., caregiver and practitioner) or explanation by one adult to another (e.g., practitioner to caregiver or visa versa). If a majority of the content of the visit includes activities that do not directly involve the child, use of the Scale is not appropriate. Coding is discontinued following this category if the videotape does not include an activity involving the child.

Type of Activity:

Category of the activity that is taking place. Depending on the length of the videotape being rated, one or more activities may occur.

Engagement Of the Child:

One of three categories – not engaged, somewhat engaged, and very engaged -- is selected to represent the child's overall level of engagement in the activity(ies) on the videotape. Children's levels of engagement may vary, especially in videotaped visits where more than one activity occurs. This category is rated by indicating the category most representative of the child's level of engagement across all activities. For example, if the child were very engaged in a 5 minute eating activity and somewhat engaged in a 10 minute play activity with a variety of toys, the tape would be rated as "somewhat engaged" as representative of the child's level of engagement in a majority of the videotape.

Leader of The Activity:

One of three categories – home visitor, caregiver, or child – is selected to indicate the person who initiated the activity. For example, an early intervention teacher may come into the home, select toys from those in the home, and initiate a play activity with the child to provide opportunities to practice fine motor manipulation skills. In this case, the home visitor is the initiator or leader of the activity. A caregiver may be using the child's own toys to engage the child in a play activity and would be considered to be the initiator or leader of this activity. Where more than one activity (e.g., both eating and play occur during the visit) occurs during the videotape, the category most representative of videotape contents would be rated. For example, if the occupational therapist's visit begins as the caregiver is already feeding the child and, when feeding ends, the therapist selects toys for the child to play with and then plays with the child, the therapist would be considered the leader or initiator of the activity if therapist-chosen activity is longer in duration than the feeding activity. If a child was participating at a child care center in an art activity with other children, and the home visitor "joined" that activity, the child would be considered the initiator of the activity.

Materials:

In order to rate this category, the rater makes a judgment about whether or not the materials that are used in the activity can be found naturally in the setting. For example, if a physical therapist were using a "therapy ball" to facilitate balance reactions with a child who is sitting on the ball in the child's living room, the materials category would be rated as "un-natural" since "therapy balls" are not typically found in family living rooms. However, if the videotape were of the gross motor time in a child care program, or of a toddler gym program such as Baby Gym or Gymboree, where balls and other equipment were available to promote children's motor development, the ball would be rated as a natural material.

Role of

Caregiver: The caregiver's role is rated in one of three categories -- not present, observer, or directly interacting with the child. As with other categories, the rating that most represents the caregiver's overall role during the session is selected. For example, if the caregiver were watching the home visitor interact with the child but left the room for 5 minutes to answer the phone, the category selected would be observer.

Role of

Home Visitor: The home visitor's role is rated in one of four categories –

- passive observer (i.e., not interacting with caregiver or child),
- active observer (i.e., interacting minimally with caregiver and/or child),
- directing activity with the child, or
- facilitating activity between caregiver and child.

A tape that showed the caregiver doing something with the child (e.g., playing with toys; feeding the child; swinging with the child on playground or backyard swings) where the home visitor was watching or observing the activity and not interacting or speaking with either the caregiver or child is an illustration of a home visitor who is playing a *passive observer* role. However, if the home visitor spoke to the caregiver or generally commented on either the caregiver's or the child's performance, the *active observer* category would be selected. If the physical therapist were working with the child to promote sitting balance or the occupational therapist is playing with the child with play-doh to encourage the child to interact with sticky materials, the role of *directing the activity* with the child would be selected. When the caregiver and child are engaged in an activity (e.g., the caregiver is feeding the child) and the home visitor is providing specific guidance to the caregiver in order to improve or validate the strategies being used, the category of *facilitating activity* would be selected as the role of the home visitor.

As with other categories, the most representative role is the category that is scored. For example, if the vision specialist worked with the child in a 10 minute play activity designed to promote the child's looking and tracking of an object and then suggested to the caregiver to try the activity and the caregiver did so for 5 minutes with the home visitor either observing or facilitating, the category of *directing the activity* would be selected.

Overall Rating:

An overall rating of one of two categories – setting-provided or participation-based – is made based on the ratings in four of the earlier categories. Categories used to determine rating are: leader of activity, materials, role of caregiver, and role of home visitor. Each item on the scale is scored as “0” or “1” with the exception of observer under the role of the home visitor category; active observer is scored as “.5” and passive observer is scored as “0”. A score of 2 or below is classified as *setting provided*; scores of 2.5 or above (maximum score = 4) are classified as *participation-based*.

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Tape #: _____ **Length of Tape:** _____ **Rater:** _____ **Date Rated:** _____

SETTING		(Please check applicable setting(s))		
Room in the child's home				
Area adjacent to the home (e.g., backyard play area)				
Area in the child's/family's neighborhood (e.g., library; rec center, playground; walks in neighborhood)				
Recreational setting selected and used by family (e.g., gymboree; Y swim program; health club)				
Community setting selected and used by family (e.g., church; restaurants; stores; mall)				
Transportation (e.g., car; bus-public)				
Child care program				
Other:				
ACTIVITY		(Please check applicable activity)		
Child/HV, child/caregiver, or child/caregiver/HV are engaged in an activity in which the child's participation is being facilitated or child learning strategies are being embedded.				
An activity is going on with the child but the caregiver/HV are engaged in a discussion that is not related to the way in which the participants are interacting in the activity				
* Caregiver-HV are engaged in discussion, and NO specific activity is occurring with the child.				
* There is NO meaningful interaction (either physical or verbal) between any of the participants.				
* If there is no activity occurring, discontinue coding here.				
TYPE OF ACTIVITY		(Please check applicable activit(ies))		
Participation in Activity/Routine outside the home: _____ (e.g., participating at a restaurant; participating in story time during child care; riding in the car)				
Self-Care – Eating, Bathing, Dressing				
Playing with toys or other materials by self, with caregiver, with other children				
Motor activities (e.g., swinging; crawling/climbing)				
Socializing with other children				
Communication skills				
Other: _____				
ENGAGEMENT OF CHILD		(Please circle appropriate response)		
How engaged is the child in the activity?	Not engaged	Somewhat engaged	Very engaged	
LEADER OF ACTIVITY		(Please circle appropriate response)		
Who initiated the activity?	HV (0)	Caregiver (1)	Child (1)	
MATERIALS		(Please circle appropriate response)		
Can the materials used in the activity be found naturally in the setting?	No – unnatural (0)	Yes – natural (1)		
ROLE OF CAREGIVER		(Please circle appropriate response)		
What is the role of the caregiver in the activity?	Not Present (0)	Observer (0)	Directly interacting with child (1)	
ROLE OF HV		(Please circle appropriate response)		
What is the role of the HV in the activity?	Passive Observer (no interaction) (0)	Active Observer (limited conversation with child and/or caregiver) (0.5)	Directing activity with child (0)	Facilitating activity between caregiver and child (1)
OVERALL RATING				
Given the ratings above, the overall intervention can be best categorized as:	Setting-provided (2 pts or less)		Participation-based (2.5 pts or more)	