

Free Play

“Free Play” means that a child is permitted to select materials and companions and, as far as possible, to manage their play independently. Adult interaction is in response to the child’s needs.

Having sufficient free play is important in early childhood programs because it is during this type of activity that children learn to make their own choices, interact with others socially, and use their imagination. Children can choose to play and learn in the way that is most effective for their own personality, following their interests and working on the skills that they really need to develop.

Free play requires an organized structure in which the choices are clear to children, safe options are plentiful, and staff supervise carefully to ensure productive engaged behavior.

All About ECERS-3 Item 34, page 447



TN ELDS Guiding Principles: *Four-year-old children are active, eager learners. A primary approach to learning is through purposeful, meaningful play. Intentional planning promotes rich learning experiences that invites participation, involve multiple contexts, and engage the senses which help children explore their environment.*

Executive Function (or self-regulation) is vital for children’s growth and development and strongly correlates with positive academic outcomes. *High quality early childhood experiences enhance and expand optimal brain development.*

Head Start ELOF: *Teaching must be intentional and focused on how children learn and grow. Children are active, engaged, and eager learners. Good teaching practices build on those intrinsic strengths by providing developmentally appropriate instruction and meaningful play.*

ECERS-3 Item 34, page 81

5.1 Free play takes place for at least 1 hour during the observation, including some time inside and some outside, weather permitting.

5.2 Staff frequently interact positively with children during free play (Ex: have conversations about things that interest them; talk about how play activity relates to other experiences)

5.3 Ample and varied materials and equipment accessible for free play, so that children are able to find engaging activities with little if any competition.

Notes for Clarification: 5.3 It should feel as if there is a wealth of choices for children, from which there are many *interesting* possibilities for satisfying play.

7.2 Staff use a wide variety of words to expand children's knowledge during free play activities.



Teachers' Role

(Aligns with CLASS strategies)

- **Provide new information**
- **Introduce appropriate new challenges**
- **Add new words**
- **Ask questions**
- **Extend the play by adding new materials**

The interactions teachers have with children during free play are the most effective teaching opportunity that staff have with children. (All About ECERS-3, page 448)