In this first of six tip sheets on the North Carolina Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), we will look at the quality indicators for Furnishings, Display and Space.

**Space Size and Arrangement**
According to the ITERS and ECERS, the first thing that should be considered is whether the size of the classroom space is adequate to accommodate the children, adults and furnishings that occupy it. In other words, classroom space should not be so full of equipment that the free movement of children and adults is hampered—especially children, who need open areas to crawl, walk and play without being crowded. The space also should be accessible to children and adults with disabilities, even if no one participating in the program has disabilities that require special mobility accommodations. The arrangement of the room should allow caregivers to supervise all of the children without having their view obstructed.

**Furniture**
Each child (depending on his or her age) should have a child-sized chair to sit in for meals and activities, a mat or crib to sleep on, and a cubby or other storage area for their personal belongings. Classroom furniture also should be easily accessible and convenient to use. For example, tables and chairs for eating and high chairs should be placed on an easy-to-clean floor; diapering tables should be placed near a sink. Low open shelves should be provided to hold toys and learning materials so that they are easily accessible to the children. In early childhood classrooms, the use of a woodwork bench, sand/water table or easel also is recommended. Both ITERS and ECERS note the need for adaptive furniture for students with physical disabilities, but point out that it is not necessary if children participating in the program do not have disabilities that require special accommodations.

**Lighting and Room Comfort**
Classroom space should have sufficient lighting, fresh air, room heating/cooling control and sound absorption. It is recommended that rooms provide natural lighting from windows and/or skylights with blinds or curtains to control the lighting and that they should open so that fresh air can be circulated in the room or a ventilating fan could be used. The space and furnishings should be in good repair (no chipping paint, sharp edges or splinters), be clean and well maintained.

**Soft Areas**
“Softness” for children’s relaxation and comfort is another important classroom consideration and includes the use of rugs, cushions and pillows, and soft stuffed toys. Softness should be available in several classroom areas and in a specific “cozy area” separated from active physical play areas. The cozy area should be accessible to children for a large portion of the day (at least 1/3 of the time that children are in care) and all of the soft furnishings should be clean and in good repair. Cots, pillows and blankets used for naps are not considered as softness indicators.

**Privacy Space**
In addition to a cozy area, a space for privacy, accessible to children for a substantial portion of the day, also should be provided. A privacy space is a small area or table where only one or two children may play at a time, separated from the group (i.e. a computer area that only accommodates two children at a time).

**Play Space**
Play space for children is important and should be arranged into interest areas promoting different types of play. In fact, it is considered best practice for early childhood classrooms to have at least five interest centers defined. For instance, interest areas for early childhood classrooms include the cozy area, the block area, the art area, the dramatic play...
area, the reading area, the nature/ science area, the music area and the manipulatives area. Interest areas for infants and toddlers are the cozy area, block area, music area, fine motor area and active physical play area. Adequate space should be provided near where materials are stored for the children to play. The quiet and active play areas should be separated so they do not interfere with one another.

Materials in these interest areas should be labeled and stored in a way that makes them accessible to the children and promotes independent use. Low open shelves and sturdy storage containers are recommended. Closed shelves are recommended for those toys that require adult supervision. It also is suggested that additional play materials be available so toys can be rotated to provide children with variety.

Display
Another aspect of the room arrangement discussed in the environment rating scales is the display for children. Pictures and seasonal displays in classrooms should be age appropriate, be displayed at children’s eye level, and should not contain any images that could be frightening to young children. The displays should also reflect current classroom activities and seasons and may be used as topics for discussion.

In toddler and early childhood classrooms, most of the displayed work should be individualized art done by the children. In infant and toddler classrooms, there should be mobiles and other colorful hanging objects for the children to see. Photos of the children in the class and their families also are recommended. Whenever possible, displays should be protected to prevent them from being damaged.