



# THE ENVIRONMENT & POLICY ASSESSMENT AND OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT

*Procedures and Protocol*

Purpose: The purpose of the EPAO is to objectively and effectively describe the nutrition and physical activity environment and practices of child care centers.

Data Collectors: Each data collector will undergo a training period and will complete a mock assessment along side an experienced observer before being considered as certified.

## 1. Training

- Data collectors will be trained during a one-day intensive training provided by an experienced observer. Training will include:
  - i. General observation techniques.
  - ii. A review of the EPAO instrument and its uses.
  - iii. A description of outdoor and indoor play equipment and space.
  - iv. A description of child care food service.
  - v. A lesson on menu review.
  - vi. Lessons on interview techniques and procedures.
  - vii. Instruction and demonstration of record keeping and form completion.
  - viii. A mock-observation to be completed along side a gold standard observer.

## 2. Certification Testing

- Objective 1: To ensure that information collected accurately reflects the child care center environment and its policies.
  - i. A comparison rate of 85% between the gold standard observer and the trainee must be seen during the certification
- Objective 2: To ensure proper document review is performed
  - i. A comparison rate of at least 95% between the gold standard reviewer and trainee must be seen during review of documents for certification
- Objective 3: To ensure the proper completion of the EPAO measure.
  - i. For each EPAO subsection no more than 1 error is permissible

## Materials Needed:

- Pen
- Stopwatch
- EPAO forms: EPAO Observation, EPAO Document Review

## Sampling:

- All child care centers will be observed at baseline and approximately 6-months later following the NAP SACC intervention.
- The observation will take place over one entire day, from center open to center close.
- Only one 3-5 year old classroom will be observed.

## Preparation

1. The child care observation day must be prearranged with the center to avoid conflicts in schedule such as holidays and center vacations.
2. Consent must be obtained from the center in order for the observation to be completed.
3. Document requests should be made one week prior with a reminder phone call 2 days prior for pick-up on the observation day (see list at end).

4. The observation tracking form will provide a list of all centers, the scheduled date of visit and the scheduled observed will be completed prior to data collection.

#### General Guidelines:

##### 1. Child/Observer Interaction

- Attempt to minimize conversation and contact with all children. The children will be aware of the observer's presence and will be told that a visitor is at the center all week to watch the children play, eat, and participate in center activities. The children will undoubtedly be curious at first and will try to interact with the observer. Discourage interaction by avoiding eye contact and minimizing conversation in a curt but pleasant manner. Observers should not interject themselves into the interactions between children.

##### 2. Confidentiality

- All data collected should be treated in a confidential manner. Do not leave notes, names, IDs, or forms unattended. Do not discuss the EPAO measurement tool with the center staff or children. Data will be linked in the computer to child care center ID only, not name, and upon completion of the study all paperwork linking name to ID will be destroyed.

##### 3. Dress

- Field staff should dress comfortably and comfortable shoes should be worn as well. Name tags and any visitors IDs provided by the center should be worn at all times.

#### Data Collection:

##### 1. Advanced preparation

- Prior to arriving at the center the Director will be contacted in order to set up an observation date, ideally not conflicting with any scheduled parties or field trips. At this time a packet of information will be requested to be compiled for the first day of observation including: written center policies/procedures (see list on final page), food service menus for the past 3 months (if possible), daily classroom schedules, center layout (map if possible).
- **Important:** Prior to observation, the EPAO document should be thoroughly reviewed by the observer to become familiar with the key constructs – there are likely to be situations where multiple constructs will be observed at once, so familiarity with the measure will be essential for effectiveness.

##### 2. Observation

- One classroom will be chosen randomly for observation
- The entire day should be observed.
- During “down time” (i.e. naps), environmental assessment can be conducted of indoor and outdoor spaces

##### 3. Document review

- Can review during down time or after the observation day
- Any documents that can not be taken offsite should be reviewed and recorded during nap time or at the end of the day
- All other documents should be taken out of the center and reviewed within 48 hours of the visit.

#### Quality Control:

Quality control is needed to ensure that all observation data are collected in a standardized and reliable manner. All data collectors will be assessed for inter-observer reliability prior to beginning the data collection at baseline and follow-up. A comparison rate of 85% must be met among observers.

## Document Review Checklist

- \_\_\_\_\_ Weekly menu
- \_\_\_\_\_ Center Nutrition Policies
- \_\_\_\_\_ Center PA Policies
- \_\_\_\_\_ Guidelines for parents on holiday / celebration foods
- \_\_\_\_\_ Fundraising materials
- \_\_\_\_\_ Training materials for staff on Nutrition
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Trainer credentials?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Training materials for staff on PA
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Trainer credentials?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Educational materials for parents on Nutrition
- \_\_\_\_\_ Educational materials for parents on PA
- \_\_\_\_\_ Curriculum materials for children on Nutrition
- \_\_\_\_\_ Curriculum materials for children on PA
- \_\_\_\_\_ Safety check documentation