



Early Childhood Education  
Association of Colorado  
*Shaping the Future*

# Quality

---

“There is an extraordinary international consensus among child researchers and practitioners about what quality child care is; it is warm, supportive interactions with adults in a safe, healthy and stimulating environment, where early education and trusting relationships combine to support individual children’s physical, emotional, social and intellectual development.” Sandra Scarr, NICHD researcher

While many researchers and child care advocates can identify the features of quality care as described above, defining and operationalizing them so that they can be measured, and then identifying their presence or absence in particular settings is even more complex.

Different people measure quality differently based on their personal viewpoints: researcher, parent, provider, regulator, funder or child. Additionally, what constitutes a quality program for preschoolers may differ from a quality program for an infant or toddler.

“For infants, relationships with caring adults do not just dictate the quality of care; they *are* the quality of care.” - Penelope Leach, *Child Care Today*

Furthermore, if a child is not happy in a quality program as measured by the QRIS, then that program is not “quality” for that child. Finding one simple set of measurements that fits everyone’s needs is difficult.

There are two characteristics of child care which contribute to its quality: process and structure. Structural aspects of child care are those that are relatively fixed and are often open to regulation: buildings and classrooms, group sizes, teacher-child ratios, health and safety measures, training of staff, and management structure.

Process refers to the nature of children’s experience in child care: their interactions with adults and with other children, their learning experiences, the richness and variety for stimulation that is available to them, and the responsiveness of the setting to them. Process characteristics are more difficult to measure but are considered more important than structural characteristics because they influence children more directly.

While structural aspects such as staff education should result in quality experiences for young children, that may not always be true; therefore an effective rating system will measure both structural and process aspects with age appropriate tools.

Keeping in mind the overarching aspects of process and structure, and the quality measures important to different viewpoints, the Early Childhood Education Association has identified these key quality indicators:

## Structural:

1. Well trained staff
2. Safety of children
3. Healthy environment

4. Age appropriate environments
5. Age appropriate curriculum
6. Articulation among ages served
7. Diversity of activities and educational experiences

Process:

1. Children feel secure and loved
2. Stimulating environment
3. Stimulating curriculum
4. Nurturing staff who are child centered
5. Positive teacher interactions
6. Choices that meets the unique needs of diverse families
7. Effective director
8. Parental involvement

There is not room in this paper to give specifics on these indicators; however an effective quality rating system will include these indicators. The Early Childhood Education Association supports a diverse system of measuring quality including nationally recognized accreditation programs and quality rating systems. We believe there should be choice for providers to choose a rating or accreditation system that meets their needs and reflects their educational values.