

NSACA Program Observation Tool

Based on the

National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA)
Standards for Quality School-Age Child Care

The NSACA Standards for Quality School-Age Care were:

- Developed by NSACA and the National Institute for Out-of-School Time
- Based on the ASQ (Assessing School-Age Child Care Quality) Program Observation Instrument and Questions for the Director by Susan O'Connor, Thelma Harms, Debby Cryer, and Kathryn A. Wheeler

Note: Words and phrases underlined in this Observation Tool are defined in *NSACA Standards for Quality School-Age Care*.

Observer's Name _____

Group Observed _____

Date _____ Time Observed, from: _____ to: _____

Suggestions for Observing a Program

1. Schedule the observation on a day when the children will be engaged in routine activities. Do not observe on a day when a special event like a field trip or a carnival is planned.
2. Allow enough time to see the whole range of activities offered, if possible. In an after-school program, it is best to see arrival and departure, indoor and outdoor activities, snack, and transitions.
3. To be well prepared for the observation:
 - Read through the Program Observation to familiarize yourself with the standards.
 - Arrive early enough to get a short tour from the Director so you can meet the staff, go over the schedule, and see all the areas the program uses.
4. While observing:
 - Use the full range of the rating scale. Do not be afraid to use the zero if the standard is not being met. Even the best programs have areas for improvement.
 - Be specific. Write down exactly what you see and hear to support your rating.
5. When you have finished observing:
 - To get more information when you can't rate one of the standards, ask the staff to "tell me more about ..." or "what do you do about ...?" Avoid "yes" or "no" questions like "Do you ...?"
 - Be sure to thank the Director and staff for having you observe.
 - Finish making your ratings within 24 hours, while the observation is fresh in your memory.
 - Add up the number of points for each key and put the total in the box at the bottom.

16. The safety and security of children and youth are protected.

Guiding Questions: Do families, children, and staff generally feel that this is a safe and healthy environment? Have parents, children, or staff expressed concern about a potential safety hazard? Do we review and discuss future prevention strategies?

- a. There are no observable safety hazards in the program space.
- All of the following are covered and secured: electrical cords, heating pipes, sharp-edged objects.
 - All stairs and climbing structures have railings.
 - The cubbies, shelves, and dividers are secured so that they cannot tip over on children.

Key

Standard

Examples

You will choose a rating for every standard.

- 0 = no evidence, the standard is not met
- 1 = little evidence, the standard is somewhat met
- 2 = more evidence, the standard is substantially met
- 3 = consistent evidence, the standard is fully met

You might not be able to see enough to make a rating. Ask the staff questions about things you didn't see.

When you don't directly observe something, you'll have to use your judgment to make the rating based on what the Director and staff say and how consistent it sounds with all of the other things you've observed.

There is a space at the bottom of the page for the total of all your ratings for that page. Fill it in AFTER you have completed your whole observation and talked with staff.

Make specific notes of what you observe. In discussing your observations, describe body language, facial expressions, and exact words people used.

For example:

Good comments— Specific and objective	Poor comments— General and judgmental
<i>"Mary said to the boy, 'Like, I should be excited about that?' when he showed her his new baseball shirt."</i>	<i>"One staff person was sarcastic."</i>
<i>"Two staff stood leaning against the fence talking to each other for ten minutes on the playground."</i>	<i>"Staff wasn't involved with the children."</i>
<i>"No one on staff spoke to five of the parents who came to pick up their kids."</i>	<i>"Staff wasn't friendly to parents."</i>

Human Relationships

1. Staff relate to all children and youth in positive ways.

Guiding Questions: How do we greet children? Are they happy to be with us? Do we feel we have enough time to talk with individual and small groups of children every day? What else can we do to help children in our program feel welcome?

	Comments	Rating
a. Staff treat children with respect and listen to what they say. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff do not belittle children. • They take children's comments seriously. • Staff do not intrude or interrupt children. • Staff use supportive language. • They make statements like "Keep trying; you can do it!" 		0 1 2 3
b. Staff make children feel welcome and comfortable. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff project a tone of welcome in their voices and gestures. • Staff acknowledge children when they arrive and depart. • They respond appropriately when children show affection. • Staff stay calm in all situations. • They handle conflicts in a way that reduces fear or disruption. 		0 1 2 3
c. Staff respond to children with acceptance and appreciation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff are kind and fair to all children. • They include all interested children in activities and events. Games and sports are open to all, regardless of their athletic skill. • Staff do not separate children by gender. • They do not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, gender, ethnicity, family structure, appearance, disability, etc. 		0 1 2 3
d. Staff are engaged with children. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff talk and play with the children. • They show interest in what the children say and do. • Staff participate in many activities with children. • Staff sit with children at snack time. • Staff show that they enjoy children. • Staff seem cheerful rather than bored, tired, or distant. • Staff spend little time on tasks that do not involve the children. 		0 1 2 3

0 = not at all 1 = sometimes 2 = most of the time 3 = all of the time

Total, a-d: _____

2. Staff respond appropriately to the individual needs of children and youth.

Guiding Questions: Are we aware of the many interests, abilities, and talents of our children? How do we respond to their different cultures and languages? In what other ways can we help each child grow and learn?

	Comments	Rating
<p>a. Staff know that each child has special interests and talents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff are able to spend time with individual children. • Staff bring in materials related to children's interests: pets, music, sports, computers, chess, etc. • Specialists are used for certain activities. • Staff are eager to hear about events in children's lives outside the program. 		0 1 2 3
<p>b. Staff recognize the range of children's abilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff vary their responses to match children's ages and abilities. • Staff help children become focused and engaged. • Staff help children pursue their interests and improve their skills. • Staff offer enrichment activities. • Staff help children with their homework. • Staff substitute equipment as needed, such as using a large beach ball instead of a volleyball for outdoor games. 		0 1 2 3
<p>c. Staff can relate to a child's <u>culture</u> and home <u>language</u>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff provide resources that show different cultural perspectives. • They help children use books, music, and tapes in different languages. • Visual displays show a variety of cultures. • Signs include the home languages of the children in the program. • Children have an opportunity to speak their home language with peers and staff. • Guests from various cultural traditions are invited to speak at the program and share their experiences. • Staff also serve as coaches, mentors, and friends. 		0 1 2 3
<p>d. Staff respond to the range of children's feelings and <u>temperaments</u>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff try to understand the different ways children express their feelings (e.g., different cultural styles to show respect for authority, express hurt or anger or warmth). • Staff try to assess children's feelings before attempting to solve a problem. • Staff find suitable ways to include all children. • Staff accept a child's desire to be alone. • Staff remain calm and patient with an angry child. • Staff comfort a child who appears hurt, upset, or disappointed. 		0 1 2 3

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Total, a-d: _____

3. Staff encourage children and youth to make choices and to become more responsible.

Guiding Questions: What kinds of choices can children in the program make? How often do we let them choose what they are going to do, and with whom? Are we helping them to take initiative and assume leadership roles? Do we include children when we plan activities?

	Comments	Rating
<p>a. Staff offer assistance in a way that supports a child's initiative.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff help children find ways to pursue their own interests. • Staff say "yes" to children's reasonable requests and ideas for activities. • Staff help children plan projects and gather resources. 		0 1 2 3
<p>b. Staff assist children without taking control, and they encourage children to take leadership roles.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff give clear directions so that children can proceed independently. • When asked, staff step in to help children. • Staff encourage children to proceed on their own. 		0 1 2 3
<p>c. Staff give children many chances to choose what they will do, how they will do it, and with whom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have frequent opportunities to choose their companions. • Children help prepare and/or serve their own food. • Children set up activities and/or clean up afterwards. • Older children may choose to set up their own clubhouse. When field trips are planned, some children may choose to stay at the program. 		0 1 2 3
<p>d. Staff help children make informed and responsible choices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff remind children to think about how their actions may affect others in the program. • Staff ask questions that guide children to make good decisions. • Staff help children understand the impact of their decisions on others. 		0 1 2 3

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Total, a-d: _____

4. Staff interact with children and youth to help them learn.

Guiding Questions: What kinds of questions do we ask children to encourage creative thinking? How do we respond to children's curiosity? What approaches do we use to answer their questions? How do we help children reflect on what they are learning? Are we able to work with individual children who need our help and support throughout the day?

	Comments	Rating
<p>a. Staff ask questions that encourage children to think for themselves.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff pursue children's ideas. • Staff start discussions by asking open-ended questions (e.g., "what if?" or "how can we ...?"). • Staff encourage children to use journal writing, art projects and <u>group</u> discussions as a way to express their ideas. • Staff take time to think about children's questions. 		0 1 2 3
<p>b. Staff share skills and resources to help children gain information and solve problems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff show children how and where to find answers to questions. • Staff show children how complex skills can be broken into smaller steps. • Staff encourage children to practice basic life skills. • When children face problems they cannot solve themselves, staff offer suggestions. 		0 1 2 3
<p>c. Staff vary the approaches they use to help children learn.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff teach children a new task or game by showing the steps as well as telling about them. • Staff write down instructions for activities so that children can remember what to do. • Staff pay attention to <u>culture</u> and gender variations in learning styles. • They recognize non-verbal as well as verbal responses. • They encourage children to try new activities. • They help children move beyond gender stereotypes in their choices. • Staff use pictures and visual aids to reach out to non-readers and speakers of other languages. • Staff modify activities as needed so that all children, including those with disabilities, can participate. 		0 1 2 3
<p>d. Staff help children use <u>language</u> skills through frequent conversations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff speak to children on a level children seem to understand. • They listen patiently as all children try to express themselves. • Staff take extra time with children who speak another home language or have difficulty listening or speaking. • Staff try to find effective ways to communicate with all children. • Staff sometimes use non-verbal signals to help children understand. 		0 1 2 3

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Total, a-d: _____

	Comments	Rating
<p>5. Staff use positive techniques to guide the behavior of children and youth. Guiding Questions: How do we model caring, cooperation, and respect? Can we identify a pattern for the types of conflict that occur most often? Are there times when conflicts are most likely to occur? Are there simple changes we can make to prevent these conflicts from occurring? What methods do we use to help children resolve their conflicts?</p> <p>a. Staff give attention to children when they cooperate, share, care for materials, or join in activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff often show appreciation and encouragement. • They avoid using insincere praise and threats to control children's behavior. • Staff teach children how to communicate and cooperate. • Staff celebrate children's efforts and progress. 		0 1 2 3
<p>b. Staff set appropriate limits for children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff set limits to prevent children from hurting each other physically or verbally. • If children tease, scapegoat, threaten, or exclude others, staff step in. • Staff avoid setting unrealistic limits, such as expecting children to be quiet most of the day. • Staff take steps to ensure that each child understands the limits that are set. 		0 1 2 3
<p>c. Staff use no harsh discipline methods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff do not shame, yell, hit, or withhold food. • The whole group is not scolded or punished when one child breaks a rule. • Staff avoid correcting children publicly. • Staff do not force children to explain their behavior or apologize. 		0 1 2 3
<p>d. Staff encourage children to resolve their own conflicts. Staff step in only if needed to discuss the issues and work out a solution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff listen and observe carefully. • Staff use negotiation, reasoning, and redirection to help children find alternatives. • Staff do not impose their solutions on children. • Staff rarely lecture children. • Staff help children express their feelings. • Staff help children understand how their behavior affects others. • Staff teach children specific skills to work through conflicts (e.g., circle time, peace table, or conflict-resolution skills). 		0 1 2 3
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6. **Children and youth generally interact with one another in positive ways.**

Guiding Questions: Do children seem to enjoy spending time together? Do they talk about friends at the program? Do they tend to include others from different backgrounds, or with different abilities in their play?

	Comments	Rating
a. Children appear relaxed and involved with each other.		0 1 2 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Group</u> sounds are pleasant most of the time. 		
b. Children show respect for each other.		0 1 2 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teasing, belittling, or picking on particular children is uncommon. • Children show sympathy for each other and help each other. 		
c. Children usually cooperate and work well together.		0 1 2 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children willingly share materials and space. • They suggest activities, negotiate roles, and jointly work out the rules. • Children include others with developmental, physical, or <u>language differences</u> in their play. • Children often help each other. • There is a strong sense of <u>community</u>. 		
d. When problems occur, children often try to discuss their differences and work out a solution.		0 1 2 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children listen to each other's point of view and try to compromise (e.g., if two children want to use the same equipment, they may decide to take turns as a solution). • Children know how to solve problems. • Their solutions are usually reasonable and fair. • They do not try to solve disagreements by bullying or acting aggressively. 		

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Total, a-d: _____

7. Staff and families interact with each other in positive ways.

Guiding Questions: How do we help our families feel welcome and comfortable? Do we know enough about our families? Do families from all backgrounds seem to be involved and connected?

	Comments	Rating
<p>a. Staff make families feel welcome and comfortable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and family members greet one another by name. • Staff use friendly voices, expressions, and gestures. • They are relaxed and not abrupt with each other. 		0 1 2 3
<p>b. Staff and families treat each other with respect.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and family members show interest in each other's lives. • Respect is shown to all without bias. • Staff communicate with families in a variety of ways. • Staff recognize that some cultures like direct communication, while others prefer indirect. • Staff do not talk about confidential matters in front of the children or other adults. 		0 1 2 3
<p>c. Staff share the <u>languages</u> and <u>cultures</u> of the families they serve, and the communities they live in.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program's diverse staff reflect the cultures and languages of the children in the program. • Whenever possible, staff speak with families in their home language. • Staff ask translators to help communicate with families during individual and large-group meetings. • Staff avoid using children as translators if possible. • Staff provide information written in the family's home language. • Displays and signs reflect the diversity in the <u>community</u>. 		0 1 2 3
<p>d. Staff and families work together to make arrivals and departures between home and child care go smoothly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family members can easily find their children and their children's possessions. • Conversations with family members do not take attention away from children or their activities. 		0 1 2 3
Total, a-d:		

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