

## Does your program have a “Much of the Day” red flag?

There is much discussion on how to interpret the term “much of the day,” especially considering the lengthy definition that has been revised on a few occasions. This term is further difficult to understand because there is no mathematical equation for calculating whether a program is meeting “much of the day” as there is in the ECERS-R scale for substantial portion of the day. The core concept of what this term means is found in the first three sentences of the definition:

**“Much of the day refers to the time materials are accessible to the children. It means most of the time that any child may be awake and able to play. Since many very young children will be on individual schedules, access must be provided when any child is awake”** (Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 2006, p.7). These sentences tell us what “much of the day” is, while the remaining sentences of the explanation focus more on what it is not. Let’s consider this definition from the perspective of four red flags. If a program can identify with one of these, there is a good chance adjustments need to be made to the daily flow of activities so children can have access to materials “when any child is awake.”

	<p>Children are spending too much time in spaces away from their classroom where most of the play materials are located. For example, children are spending most of the morning outdoors or in an indoor gym. While gross motor play is important, and the ITERS-R recommends one hour of gross motor play daily, spending much more time in gross motor spaces can limit the amount of time children play with materials expected for “much of the day.” One way to ensure access to materials, especially when weather is really nice and outdoor time is desired, is to make sure activities are offered outside that will contribute to, rather than take away from, “much of the day.”</p>
	<p>Children are kept in groups for activities. As children grow, their ability to participate in a large group does increase; however, this is a gradual process. Group activities are not necessarily inappropriate but if they last longer than the children show interest or if there are too many times during the day where group participation is expected, they become inappropriate. A brief and appropriate circle time or art activity in a one or two-year-old classroom will not affect “much of the day.” However, one long group time or several shorter ones strung together will affect this quality expectation. If group play activities are part of the program, children who lose interest should have the option to participate in play with materials. Teachers should be flexible as children join or leave the group.</p>
	<p>Lengthy routines can also affect the scoring of “much of the day.” This is particularly true for programs that have a predetermined toileting schedule that necessitates taking all the children to the bathroom at one time. While having a bathroom down the hall is sometimes an unavoidable situation, strategies can be used so children do not have to wait at the bathroom for long periods. If extra staff are available to take children one at a time, then the rest of the children do not have to be interrupted from their play. Or, if children can be taken in two smaller groups, this would also help, as would providing an activity for those children who are waiting for their turn at the bathroom. To determine whether long routines may be holding you back, have someone time your toileting routine. Assessors have seen toileting take up to 20 minutes or longer each time children are taken to the bathroom. Do what you can to shorten routines and wait times (this is seen in toileting but also in meal times and transitions to and from outdoor play as well.)</p>
	<p>Often within a classroom, infants and toddlers are divided up into two or three smaller groups that rotate through different sections of the room throughout the day. When this happens, children are often encouraged to stay with their group for activities. There may be real or assumed boundaries that prevent children from playing throughout the classroom as they wish, such as a dividing wall or teacher reminders. Children play on one side of the room for part of the day and then on the other side for another part of the day, switching sides with the other group who use the same room. Functioning like this may limit the amount of time children have access to certain types of activities and materials. For example, if dramatic play materials are located only on one side of the half wall, their time using these materials is limited because of having to swap shared spaces with another group.</p>