

# Observing in FCC Settings—Birth to Five

All children benefit socially, emotionally, and academically from learning environments with high-quality teacher-child interactions, as measured by the Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS®). However, additional guidance can enhance observations in classrooms with children from specific populations or in specific setting types. This job aid provides observers additional information about how to prepare for and conduct observations in family child care (FCC) settings.

Observing in FCC homes can be different from observing in center- or school-based programs for a variety of reasons. Family child care programs vary in their operation. In some programs, the family child care provider is the sole or primary caregiver, and learning happens in the family’s living space. Other programs are more like centers, with teachers hired by the family child care provider and a separate space on the provider’s property dedicated to the child care operations. Likewise, some larger family child care programs may serve multiple age groups, while others may serve a single mixed age group.

## Similarities and Differences between Center-Based Child Care and Family Child Care

CENTER-BASED CHILD CARE	FAMILY CHILD CARE
Larger group sizes and more adults	Smaller number of children and fewer adults. Observations take place in the provider’s home, where there may be other adults who are not caregivers as well as the provider’s own children.
Single age group	Mixed age groups enrolling children across age levels (infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and in some instances, school-aged children)
Use of single CLASS tool	May need to use two or three CLASS tools to cover the age range of children served
Same enrollment across the week and throughout the day	Different children on different days. Age ranges of children may change both across days of the week and throughout a given day, with some children attending on different days and at different times
In a classroom setting	In a home, space may be dedicated to child care, or care may take place in the family’s living space. Spatial limitations may make it difficult to find a place from which to observe, either because rooms are small or because children are distributed across multiple rooms in the house during a single cycle of observation or move frequently from room to room
Structured routines that include “school-like” activities	Schedule may be more flexible; less emphasis on pre-academics
Additional support staff to help with meal prep, etc.	Provider may be the only adult in the home, caring for the children and also cooking, serving, and cleaning up
All adults in the room are focused on the children	There may be family members present who are not a part of the daily operations of the FCC program

## Recommended Best Practices for Observations

### BEFORE THE OBSERVATION:

- Talk to the provider in advance to learn about the number and ages of the children, typical schedule, language(s) of the provider and the children, and whether or not there will be outside visitors and additional people such as the provider's family members.
- If you do not have experience with FCCs, consider doing a mock observation in advance of the first formal observation to get a sense of what a day looks like.
- Determine in advance which CLASS age level to use if there will be mixed ages present:
  - The most common approaches are
    - Select the version of CLASS that matches the majority of children in the classroom.
      - Example: A family child care home has three toddlers, one infant, and one preschool-aged child. Use Toddler CLASS.
      - Example: A family child care home has one infant and three preschool-aged children. Use Pre-K CLASS.
    - If there are an equal number of any age group of children in the birth–five age range, select the Toddler tool.
      - Example: A family child care home has two toddlers and two infants. Use Toddler CLASS.
      - Example: A family child care home has one infant, two toddlers, and two preschool-aged children. Use Toddler CLASS.
      - Example: A family child care home has four infants and four preschoolers. Use Toddler CLASS.
  - Alternate between age levels.
    - Aim to conduct three cycles per age level if there are two ages of children present.
    - Aim to conduct two cycles per age level if there are three ages of children present.
    - If alternating cycles, be certain to use the correct score sheet and refer to the correct manual when coding

### DURING THE OBSERVATION:

- Remember you are a guest in the provider's home:
  - Try to put the provider at ease by arriving early, taking time to chat with them, and explaining how the observation will go. Providers are often nervous about being observed and may feel they are being judged on both the care they provide to the children and on their home.
  - Tell the provider you will try to be as unobtrusive as possible by not interrupting any activities—if children are interested in you, you will gently redirect them.
  - Find a place in the home to sit or stand where you are able to see and hear without being disruptive, keeping in mind that you may need to move around. Be aware that space is often limited and you may feel intrusive.
  - Be aware of the impact of your movements so as not to distract the children.
- Consider the purpose of the observation:
  - If alternating age level by cycle, focus on the children in the appropriate age level during each cycle. Consider interactions with children of other ages only if they add to or subtract from the interactions with the target-age children.
  - Be sure to ask the provider which parts of the house will be used during the observation.
  - Pay close attention to naturally occurring routines (hand washing, meal preparation, preparing to go outside) to ensure that you are capturing important interactions.
  - There may be other adults in the home who are not caring for children. Their interactions should only be taken into account to the extent that they add to or detract from the children's experiences.

### WHILE CODING:

- Find a spot out of the way to code, if possible.
- Remember to stay grounded in the CLASS manual of the target age level for each cycle.
- Read your detailed notes and use the manuals to assign codes.
- Remember that the descriptions in the CLASS manual provide examples of what interactions may look like for each dimension and indicator. However, these are not the only ways that interactions play out. Focus on the intent of the dimension and indicators by referring to the definition on the face page and the key words in the manual and asking yourself if the interactions meet that intent.