Creating a Safe and Stimulating Indoor Gross Motor Environment (ECERS-3 Aligned)

This guide supports teachers in designing high-quality indoor gross motor experiences when outdoor play is not possible. It draws on key expectations from **ECERS-3**, particularly the areas of **Gross Motor Space, Gross Motor Equipment, and Supervision/Interaction and Safety**.

The goal is to ensure children continue to experience active, engaging, and developmentally rich movement opportunities indoors without compromising safety.

Why Indoor Gross Motor Play Matters

When weather limits outdoor play, children still need opportunities to: Move their bodies in big, meaningful ways , Practice balance, coordination, and strength, Take appropriate physical risks, Release energy in healthy ways, and Build social skills through cooperative movement

High-quality indoor gross motor experiences are **not simply free play in a large room**. They are intentionally designed environments that support both **safety** and **skill development**.

1. Gross Motor Space: Creating Defined Activity Areas

ECERS-3 emphasizes that space should be arranged to support children's engagement while minimizing hazards and conflicts.

Key Principle: Multiple activities can happen at the same time **but they must have defined spaces.**

For example: -Children playing with balls should be in a different area than children tumbling. Obstacle courses should not intersect with running games. Wheeled toys (if used indoors) must be separated from climbing or floor-based activities.

Practical Ways to Define Spaces in a Gym or Large Room:

- Use **cones** to outline zones
- Lay down **floor tape** to create boundaries
- Use **mats** to visually signal where certain activities belong
- Arrange **shelves or equipment** as natural dividers
- Post simple **visual signs** (e.g., "Ball Play," "Tumbling," "Obstacle Course")

Example Layout:

- **Zone 1: Ball Play Area**
  Throwing, catching, rolling games

- **Zone 2: Tumbling & Balance**
  Mats for rolling, stretching, yoga, balance poses

- **Zone 3: Obstacle Course**
  Crawling under, stepping over, climbing on low structures
- **Zone 4: Movement Games**
  Action songs, freeze dance, movement cards

Clear zones support: Fewer collisions, Better supervision, Deeper engagement, Greater independence

2. Gross Motor Equipment: Supporting at Least Seven Different Skills

ECERS-3 looks for equipment that stimulates a wide variety of gross motor skills, not just one or two types of movement.

Teachers should ensure the equipment available indoors supports at least **seven different types of gross motor skills**.

These may include:

1. **Jumping** (low platforms, hopscotch mats)
2. **Balancing** (balance beams, stepping stones)
3. **Climbing** (low climbers, foam structures)
4. **Crawling** (tunnels, under obstacles)
5. **Throwing** (soft balls, beanbags, targets)
6. **Catching** (scarves, balloons, large soft balls)
7. **Kicking** (soft balls toward goals)
8. **Rolling** (ball rolling games)
9. **Pedaling or pushing** (if appropriate indoor wheeled equipment is used safely)

Example Equipment That Promotes Multiple Skills:

- Foam blocks (climb, balance, jump, crawl)
- Cones and hoops (jumping paths, obstacle design)
- Scarves (coordination, tracking, catching)
- Beanbags (throwing, tossing, balancing on body parts)
- Tunnels (crawling, spatial awareness)
- Low balance beams or taped lines (balance, coordination)

Variety matters. Children should have access to **more than just balls or tricycles**, they need equipment that invites many kinds of movement.

3. Supervision, Interaction, and Safety

Strong ECERS-3 scores are not only about materials, they are about how teachers actively support children during play.

Effective Teacher Supervision Includes:

- Positioning themselves so they can **see all areas** of the room
- Scanning continuously rather than focusing on only one group
- Anticipating potential safety issues before they happen
- Stepping in calmly when play becomes unsafe

Teachers Support Safe Play By:

- Teaching children how to use equipment properly
- Modeling safe movement (e.g., how to carry a hula hoop, how to wait for a turn)
- Reinforcing boundaries between zones
- Using clear language:
    - "Balls stay in the ball area."
    - "Feet first on the climber."
    - "We look where our bodies are moving."

Teachers Support Rich Learning Through Interaction By:

- Narrating children's movement:
  "You're balancing so carefully across that beam."

- Asking open-ended questions:
  "How could you make this obstacle more challenging?"

- Offering gentle challenges:
  "I wonder if you could jump from this spot to that one."

- Encouraging problem-solving between peers

Supervision is most effective when teachers are **actively engaged**, not standing on the sidelines.

4. Balancing Freedom and Structure

A high-quality indoor gross motor environment allows for:

- Child choice within clear boundaries
- Multiple activities happening simultaneously
- Movement that is energetic but not chaotic
- Teachers who guide without over-directing

The structure (defined zones, clear expectations, intentional equipment) actually **creates more freedom**, because children know: 1. Where they can go 2.What they can use 3.How to play safely