



National
Guidance
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Ratios and Effective Supervision

Establishments must ensure that the staffing of visits enables leaders to supervise participants effectively. Decisions about the staffing and supervision should take account of:

- The nature and duration of the visit and the planned activities;
- The location and environment in which the activity is to take place;
- The nature of the group, including the number of participants and their age, level of development, sex, ability and needs (behavioural, medical, emotional and educational);
- Staff competence;
- The consequence of a member of staff being indisposed, particularly where they will be the sole leader with a group for any significant time.

When planning a repeat visit or a series of activities, it is important to review the previous plan (no matter how well it worked in the past) to ensure that it meets current group needs and any other changes (e.g., time of year).

A useful framework for assessing requirements for ratios and effective supervision is **SAGE**. See OEAP National Guidance document [1b "Foundations"](#):

- **S**taffing: who is needed/available? The plan must work within the limits of available numbers, abilities and experience.
- **A**ctivities to be undertaken: what do you want the group to do and what is possible?
- **G**roup characteristics: prior experience, abilities, behaviour and maturity, sex, any specific individual needs.
- **E**nvironment: indoors or out; a public space or restricted access; urban, rural or remote; quiet or crowded; within the establishment grounds, close to the establishment or at a distance; and the ease of communications between the group and base. Do not overlook environments to be passed through between venues. For residential visits consider the accommodation and surrounding area. For outdoor environments, consider remoteness, the impact of weather, water levels and ground conditions. Consider the implications of current guidance about avoiding infection during an epidemic.

Ratios

Staffing ratios are a risk management issue and should be determined through the process of risk assessment. It is not possible to set down definitive staff/participant ratios for a particular age group or activity.

Some employers, guidance documents and governing bodies do set out minimum ratios, but these should be regarded as starting points for consideration rather than being definitive, as they may be appropriate only where the activity is relatively straightforward, and the group has no special requirements.

If your employer does specify minimum ratios, you must follow their guidance.

Early Years

In England, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework sets out legal minimum ratios for all providers working with children up to age five, and for childminders working with children up to age eight – see www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2.

In Wales, the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare sets out legal minimum ratios and staffing qualifications during outings for children up to age twelve – see www.careinspectorate.wales/regulations-and-national-minimum-standards-child-care-and-play.

The appropriate ratio during an outing with Early Years children is often likely to be higher than the minimum: as with other age groups, this should be determined by risk assessment, which should be reviewed before each outing. It is not unusual for a ratio of 1:1 to be necessary.

Staffing

In some cases, there may be only one leader on a visit, or on a particular activity during a visit. If this is the case, participants (or any adult helpers) should be competent to manage in the event of the leader being taken ill or injured and should, as a minimum, know what to do to contact the establishment and get support.

Staffing, especially for visits to remote locations or overseas, should take into account how the group will be supervised effectively given the possibility of a leader becoming indisposed or having to leave the group, for example to accompany a sick child to hospital.

During some activities, staff inexperienced in that activity may need to be counted as participants rather than leaders when considering ratios.

There is no absolute requirement for participants to be accompanied by staff of the same sex, even on residentials, but if this is not to be the case then there should be a sound plan to manage the potential issues involved, including the needs for privacy, safeguarding and pastoral support. See OEAP National Guidance document [6a "FAQ – Staff Supervising Mixed-Sex Groups"](#).

If a leader or helper is the parent of a young person taking part in a visit, there is the potential for them to be distracted by the needs of their own child when their

responsibility extends to all or some of the group. This could compromise group management, particularly if there is a serious incident. The potential to be distracted can be avoided if a parent is not allocated a leadership role with direct responsibility for their own child. Sometimes this may not be possible (e.g., when a class teacher has their own child in their class). In this case consideration should be given to other ways to manage the risk, for example by ensuring that other leaders are available.

For information about ensuring the suitability of staff, see OEAP National Guidance document [3.2d "Approval of Leaders"](#).

Supervision

For detailed advice on effective supervision, see OEAP National Guidance document [4.2a "Group Management and Supervision"](#).

Further Advice

You can find further advice in the following OEAP National Guidance documents:

- [4.1a "Avoiding Accidents and Emergencies"](#);
- [4.4b "First Aid"](#);
- [4.4i "Special Educational Needs and Disabilities"](#);
- [4.4k "Coronavirus"](#).

