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Recommended adult to child ratios for working with children

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Guidance on appropriate levels of supervision for children and young people

When working with groups of children and young people there must be enough adults to provide the appropriate level of supervision.

Staffing and supervision ratios can sometimes be difficult to judge. You need to make sure you have enough staff and volunteers to ensure children are safe – and that these adults are suitable to undertake various tasks as needed.

We've put together some information to help you decide how many adult supervisors you need when you're carrying out a range of activities in different settings.

Supervision:

Supervision levels will vary depending on the children's age, gender, behaviour and the abilities within your group.

They will also vary depending on:

- the nature and duration of activities
- the competence and experience of staff involved
- the requirements of location, accommodation or organisation

- any special medical needs
- any specialist equipment needed.

Carry out a risk assessment of the activities you are planning, taking these issues into consideration. This will help you make decisions about how many adults you need and what skills and experience they should have.

> [Find out more about running safer activities and events](#)

You need to know whether adults are eligible for a vetting and barring check and be clear about any additional safeguards which need to be put in place. For example:

- ensure adults who do not meet the criteria for a vetting and barring check are being supervised at all times
- make sure all adults who have contact with children understand and agree to follow your safeguarding policy and procedures.

If you're working within the performing arts and children are being chaperoned you should make sure the relevant licences are in place.

> [Find out more about safer recruitment including vetting and barring checks](#)

> [Find out more about safeguarding in the performing arts](#)

Staff and volunteers need to have:

- an understanding of their responsibility to keep children and young people safe
- clear procedures to follow if they have a concern about a child's wellbeing
- insurance for certain activities
- codes of practice which they understand and agree to follow.

Parents who attend activities with their children should not be used to supervise other children unless they have been recruited into the role, undergone the necessary checks and had the relevant child protection training.

> [Find out more about safeguarding procedures](#)

> [Look at our example behaviour code](#)

> [Learn more about child protection training requirements for education and early years sectors](#)

> [Find out more about our introductory child protection training](#)

Staff to pupil ratios in schools

Schools are expected to carry out their own risk assessment at the beginning of each academic year to determine appropriate levels of supervision for each class except the Early years and foundation stage.

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) provides [guidance on class sizes](#) and advises schools to consider children's emotional, behavioural and special needs when determining staff to child ratios (NUT, 2019a).

Schools also need to carry out a risk assessment to determine appropriate adult to child ratios at breaks and lunchtimes. Things to consider include:

- the layout of the playground
- the number of children on the playground
- the ages of the children on the playground.

The NUT provides [guidance on playground supervision](#) (NUT, 2019b).

For children in the Early years and foundation stage there is specific guidance about supervision ratios.

Early years

In England, the Department for Education (DfE) publishes [guidance for early years providers](#) which sets out statutory requirements about adult to child ratios (DfE, 2021). The required adult to child ratios vary depending on the setting and the age of children.

Key points for all early years settings include:

- staffing arrangements must meet the needs of all children and ensure their safety
- children must usually be within both sight **and** hearing of staff and always within at least either sight **or** hearing
- only those aged 17 or over may be included in ratios (and staff under 17 should be supervised at all times)

- students on long term placements, volunteers and staff working as apprentices may be included in the ratios if they are old enough and the provider is satisfied that they are competent and responsible.

Pages 28-32 of the guidance set out the statutory staff to child ratios for: childminders; early years providers other than childminders; those providing before and after school care; and those providing holiday care.

In Northern Ireland, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) has published [minimum standards for childminding and daycare for children under 12 \(PDF\)](#) (DHSSPS, 2012). Standard 11 sets out the minimum staff to children ratios for children of different ages in different settings.

Schools in Scotland and Wales may also find the principles of best practice in the DfE and DHSSPS guidance helpful.

During the coronavirus pandemic there is more flexibility for adult to child ratios in some settings.

> [Find out more in our Coronavirus briefing: safeguarding guidance for early years](#)

Recommended adult to child ratios

There is no specific guidance about supervision ratios for organisations that are not in the education or early years sectors. We've put together some best practice guidance to help other organisations work out how many adults are needed to supervise children safely.

We recommend having at least two adults present when working with or supervising children and young people. We recommend the following adult to child ratios as the minimum numbers to help keep children safe:

- **0 - 2 years** - one adult to three children
- **2 - 3 years** - one adult to four children
- **4 - 8 years** - one adult to six children
- **9 - 12 years** - one adult to eight children
- **13 - 18 years** - one adult to ten children

Depending on the needs and abilities of the children, and the nature of the activity, you may need to have more adults than the minimum.

We recommend having at least two adults present, even with smaller groups.

If young people are helping to supervise younger children only people aged 18 or over should be included as adults when calculating adult to child ratios.

Children with additional needs or disabilities

If you are working with children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) you may need more supervision than the minimum ratios above.

For each activity you should undertake a risk assessment to help you decide on supervision ratios. The assessment should take into account children and young people's behaviour, ability and mobility. As far as possible, include input from children and young people and their parents and carers in risk assessments to ensure children's needs are met.

[> Learn more about protecting d/Deaf and disabled young people](#)

Toilet ratios

If the group has both boys and girls there should be at least one male and one female responsible adult supervising visits to the toilet.

Adults who haven't previously volunteered and haven't had the necessary vetting checks shouldn't be left alone with children or take them to the toilet unaccompanied.

In larger groups of children, encourage groups to take a comfort break together with one responsible adult while the other adult(s) supervises the remaining children and keep a head count.

First aid ratios

We recommend that at least one adult is trained in first aid.

If you're running one-off events you will need to carry out a first-aid and medical risk assessment. Many organisations provide medical services but ensure the organisation you select is competent, trained in first aid and able to cope with the demands of your event.

Travelling ratios

When travelling with children and young people the recommended adult to child ratio can vary depending on:

- size of the group
- age of the children, their behaviours and needs
- size of the vehicle that you are travelling in.

If you are travelling in a vehicle it is recommended that there is one adult driving and one adult supervising the children. Larger groups and vehicles will require more adults to ensure adequate supervision. Think about having one adult driving and at least one adult supervising the children, depending on the size of the group.

References and resources

References

Department for Education (DfE) (2021) [Early years foundation stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework](#). [Accessed 19/01/2022]

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) (2012) [Minimum standards for childminding and day care for children under age 12 \(PDF\)](#) Belfast: Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS).

National Union of Teachers (NUT) (2019a) [Class sizes](#). [Accessed 12/07/2019].

National Union of Teachers (NUT) (2019b) [Playground supervision](#). [Accessed 12/07/2019].

Elearning

Our elearning courses will help develop your understanding of how to protect children.

- [Introduction to safeguarding and child protection](#)
- [Safer recruitment](#)
- [Safer recruitment in education training](#)

Related NSPCC resources

[Safer recruitment](#)

[Safeguarding policies and procedures](#)

[Safeguarding and child protection in schools](#)

[Safer activities and events](#)