

# 3. Staffing

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Much research has been done in an endeavour to pinpoint the factors which indicate quality care for children. Two aspects which are widely considered to be major indicators of quality care are the staffing level (or staff:child ratio) and the employment of qualified staff.

Improved staff:child ratios result in more positive and frequent interactions between adults and children, greater engagement in children's play, lower levels of distress in children and more positive, nurturing behaviour from staff. Lower levels of staff to children have been linked to poor social development, limited verbal expression, poor co-ordination and low attention spans in children.

In her book, "Quality Matters", Gillian Doherty-Derkowski, (1995) summarises the results of a number of studies in centre-based children's services from several countries which show:

1. A smaller number of children per adult has been associated with:
  - adults who are sensitive and responsive to the child; and
  - adults who engage in more social, verbal or cognitive stimulation those responsible for more children.
2. A larger number of children per adults in centre based children's services is associated with:
  - a higher proportion of the adults time being spent in controlling the children;
  - a smaller proportion of time being spent in social stimulation or teaching;
  - adults who are detached or restrictive; and
  - fewer individual contacts between the child and the adult than occurs in situations where each adult is responsible for fewer children.

"The research clearly indicates that the staff-to-child ratio has a definite impact on both adult behaviour and child well-being and development. This is not surprising. Child development is fostered when there is frequent and personal interaction between the adult and child. The adult who is responsible for too many children, given their age, can do little more than attend to their physical needs and safety. He or she is also likely to be under significant job-related stress, which increased the probability of harshness and restrictiveness." (Doherty-Derkowski, 1995)

The importance of specific early childhood education and training is also stressed in studies of quality care. Research has shown that neither years of experience nor general level of education are related to outcomes for children in care. The significant variable which influences the quality of care provided is the level of related training which staff have undertaken. Early childhood programs should be staffed by adults who understand child development, who recognise and provide for children's needs, who are able to plan developmentally appropriate programs and who can competently manage groups of children.

"Adults working with children in group programs are the key to providing high quality, consistent child care. In order to be effective in aiding and enhancing child development, these adults must have sound theoretical and practical knowledge and the skills to help children grow into responsible adults. They aid and complement parents in this task" (NAEYC Position statement on staff qualifications related to quality child care).

## Staffing

### Staff qualities

3.1) There must be a procedure in place which ensures that all persons employed at, or involved with, the children of the centre are fit and proper persons.

A person is fit and proper if:

- the person is capable of providing an adequate standard of child care in accordance with the person's actual or proposed role in the centre;
- understands the needs of children, families and centre based staff and is capable of performing the professional duties of the position; and
- the person is of good character and is suitable to be entrusted with the care of children.

The test of good character includes *taking into account*:

- convictions in Australia or overseas, of any offence involving children. Offences against children include abuse, assault and neglect.
- any action taken in Australia or overseas, in respect of the protection of children who were under the guardianship or custody of the person.

The process for the selection of staff should be designed to ensure applicants are required to demonstrate the above qualities. As part of their employment practices, proprietors are advised to request police record checks and personal references, which should be checked with the referee/s.

Forms for police record checks are available from:

The Criminal History Branch  
Locked Bag No 1  
Weston ACT 2611  
phone 6256 7777.

The form required is the '**Part Exclusion**' form.

Employers should request the information directly from the police, after obtaining the applicant's permission, thus ensuring the information they receive is up-to-date and accurate.

It is considered insufficient for the applicant to supply a police check, as there is no guarantee that it is up-to-date and that it has not been tampered with. The information from the police will go directly to the employer. It is important that such information is sensitively and confidentially handled, with access only to those who must see it.

### **Staff health**

- 3.2) There must be procedures in place which:**
- a) ensure that all employees observe strict health and hygiene practices which take into account current community standards;**
  - b) ensure that staff have access to current information provided by relevant government departments;**
  - c) ensure that no staff member adversely affected by drugs or alcohol is in the presence of a child;**
  - d) ensure that alcohol or drugs (except for those required for legitimate medical reasons) are not consumed on the premises during the hours that the centre is operating; and**
  - e) ensure that smoking in the presence of children or in the child care premises is prohibited.**

Agencies which may provide current information at any time include:

- Department of Education and Community Services;
- Office of Child Care;
- Environmental and Public Health; and
- ACT Department of Health and Community Care.

*ACT Smoke-free Areas (Enclosed Public Places) Act 1994* prohibits smoking on child care premises, including all outdoor areas.

### **Controlling person**

- 3.3) When there is a change in controlling person, the proprietor must ensure that the appointed controlling person is suitable, as outlined in Section 332, Chapter 9 of the *Children and Young People Act 1999*.**
- 3.4) The Director, Children's Services must be advised of the change of a controlling person within 30 days of the change occurring.**

Upon Children's Services being notified of the change, the controlling person will be required to complete a Disclosure Declaration and Statutory Declaration.

Evidence of a satisfactory Police Records Check will also be required.

### **Supervision and staffing levels**

- 3.5) There must be sufficient primary contact staff deployed throughout the premises to ensure that no child is left without adequate supervision.**

Having adequate staffing levels throughout the Centre alone is not sufficient to meet this requirement. The way that staff are positioned throughout the Centre, and what they are doing both inside and outside, has a great bearing on the supervision of the children.

It is acknowledged that staff answer the telephone and clean up after spills and other accidents as part of their duties. When cleaning only for the immediate comfort and safety of the children, staff are included in the staff:child ratios. This may include sweeping under and around tables or giving the

## **Staffing**

- 3.6) The following staffing level for primary contact staff must be maintained at all times:**
- a) for children who are under the age of three, at least one staff member for every five (or part thereof) children; and**
  - b) for children who are three years of age and older, at least one staff member for every eleven children (or part thereof).**
- 3.7) Junior staff, that is, staff aged between 16 and 18 years of age, may be considered in calculating staffing levels, but only where it can be demonstrated that:**
- a) adequate supervision by senior staff occurs at all times; and**
  - b) junior staff have a demonstrated and appropriate skill level.**
- 3.8) Not more than one third of the contact staff may be aged under eighteen years of age.**
- 3.9) At least two staff, one of whom must be a qualified person, must be present at all times when children are on the premises.**

bathroom a quick clean after lunch.

However, when staff are involved in other cleaning tasks, such as routine vacuuming of the room, washing windows, washing up in the kitchen and other similar duties, they can not be counted as part of the staff:child ratio.

As part of the process of applying for an approval in principle/licence, the proprietor must provide a staffing plan outlining how staff will be employed to cover the day, including staff lunch and tea breaks, and preparation and planning time.

The following guidelines are provided to assist in preparing the staffing plan :

- Where meals are provided by the centre on a regular basis, additional staff are required to prepare the meals.
- When children are sleeping, adequate supervision must be maintained. The minimum level of supervision of sleeping children is continuous supervision by:
  - one staff member for children under eighteen months when there are fewer than six children; and
  - at least one staff member in each room where children are over eighteen months.

**Note:** Additional staff must be on call and available in the Centre as children wake to ensure the usual staff:child ratio is maintained with those children.

There should be ongoing in-house training for junior staff to ensure that they have the necessary skill level to meet this requirement.

A minimum of two staff ensures that any emergency can be handled without leaving the group unsupervised. In premises where rooms are isolated from others, it is desirable that two staff are in each of those rooms, or that there is a convenient means of

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**3.10) There must be a staff member with a current First Aid Level 2 Certificate on the premises at all times when children are present.**

**3.11) The centre director must be employed for a minimum of twenty hours non-contact time per week.**

### Director's position

**3.12) The director's position must be filled by an adult who has completed:**

- a) a Diploma in Community Services (Children's Services) or equivalent;**
- or**
- b) an accredited tertiary course in early childhood care or education;**
- or**
- c) a Graduate Certificate in Childcare Management.**

### Staffing levels for excursions

**3.13) The minimum staffing requirement for excursions is:**

- a) one adult for each multiple (or part thereof) of four children when the excursion involves the use of transport or the crossing of major roads;**
- b) the usual ratio of adults to children when the excursion does not involve the use of transport or crossing major roads;**
- c) at least one staff member with a current First Aid Level 2 certificate; and**
- d) sufficient primary contact to ensure that no child is left without adequate supervision.**

**3.14) Where the excursion involves significantly hazardous venues, the minimum staffing requirement is :**

communication, such as an intercom, to other parts of the centre.

It is essential that certificates are current. In some cases this means that an annual update is necessary. For advice on the status of first aid certificates, the organisations issuing certificates should be contacted.

A minimum of twenty hours per week must be identified as non-contact time to ensure that time is available for administration, professional leadership and similar tasks.

Centre directors included in the staff:child ratio must be available to, and involved with, the children and the program. Administration requirements during this time should be kept to a minimum, so as not to disrupt the program or reduce supervision.

**Note: Directors currently employed with a minimum of five years experience as a centre director who do not meet these requirements may continue in their present position.**

A qualified staff member should accompany the children on the excursion.

Centres must define, and if necessary justify, what they considered to be a major road. As a general guide, a suburban street would not be considered to be a major road unless it is a major route through the suburb. Traffic lights would generally signify a major road.

Volunteers, including parents, are considered to be "staff" for the purpose of an excursion.

Significantly hazardous venues include those where children are to swim.

## **Staffing**

- a) **one adult for each two children over three years of age;**
- b) **one adult for each child under three years of age; and**
- c) **the person in charge of the excursion must have a current First Aid Level 2 certificate, and the knowledge and ability to implement safety procedures.**

## **Documentation**

- 3.15) Verification of the qualifications of all qualified staff must be provided when requested.**

Staff must assess the potential for danger of any venue proposed for an excursion. Extra care needs to be taken when venues involve water or extremely busy traffic conditions.

## **Replacement of absent staff**

- 3.16) During any absence of the centre director longer than three consecutive working days, the proprietor shall appoint a properly qualified person to fill the position.**

Services should keep copies of the qualifications of all current staff on file. This information must be available to Children's Services and the Office of Child Care if requested.

- 3.17) If the absence of the centre director continues for longer than one week (five consecutive working days), the proprietor must notify the Director, Children's Services of the appointment of an alternative, properly qualified centre director.**

For a short absence, not more than three consecutive days, centres may choose to carry the absence without replacing the centre director. However if the absence is extended beyond three working days, a properly qualified replacement must be made.

It is crucial for the stability of the centre and the welfare of staff, children and parents that a properly qualified person takes over during lengthy absences to ensure that ongoing administrative and supervision obligations are maintained.

## **Qualified staff**

- 3.18) One in every two primary contact staff must be qualified.**

The table provided at the end of this section details options services may implement to meet this condition.

## **Qualifications**

- 3.19) There must be a designated qualified team leader for each group of children.**
- 3.20) Positions requiring a qualified person, must be filled by an adult holding one of the following qualifications:**
- a) **a Diploma in Community Services (Children's Services) or equivalent; or**
  - b) **an accredited tertiary course in early childhood care or education.**

Persons unsure about their qualification should contact the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition or a registered training organisation for advice and assessment.

## **Minimum Staff and Qualifications Options**

### **Size of group & Age of Children**

### **Minimum Staff and Qualifications**

#### **Children under 3**

##### **10 children**

- One qualified team leader holding:
    - a Diploma in Community Services (Children Services) or equivalent; or
    - an accredited tertiary course in early childhood care or education;
- and
- one assistant with no qualification requirement.

##### **15 Children**

- One qualified team leader holding an accredited tertiary course in early childhood care or education;
- and
- one assistant holding a Certificate III in Community Services (Children's Services) or equivalent;
- and
- one assistant with no qualification requirement.
- OR**
- Two qualified staff (one of whom is the designated team leader) each holding a Diploma in Community Services (Children Services) or equivalent;
- and
- one assistant with no qualification requirement.

##### **20 Children**

- Two qualified and designated team leaders each holding:
    - a Diploma in Community Services (Children Services) or equivalent; or
    - an accredited tertiary course in early childhood care or education;
- and
- two assistants with no qualification requirement.

#### **Children over 3**

##### **Up to 22 Children**

- One qualified team leader holding:
    - a Diploma in Community Services (Children Services) or equivalent; or
    - an accredited tertiary course in early childhood care or education;
- and
- one assistant with no qualification requirement.

## **Minimum Staff and Qualifications Options**

### **Size of group & Age of Children**

### **Minimum Staff and Qualifications**

#### **Children over 3**

##### **More than 22 Children**

##### **Maximum 33 children**

- One qualified team leader holding an accredited tertiary course in early childhood care or education; and
- one assistant holding a Certificate III in Community Services (Children's Services) or equivalent and
- one assistant with no qualification requirement.

##### **OR**

- Two qualified staff (one of whom is the designated team leader) each holding a Diploma in Community Services (Children Services) or equivalent; and
- one assistant with no qualification requirement.

#### **Mixed age group**

##### **Maximum of 15 children**

##### **Where the majority of children are under 3**

- One qualified team leader holding an accredited tertiary course in early childhood care or education; and
- one assistant holding a certificate III in Community Services or equivalent; and
- one assistant with no qualification requirement

##### **OR**

- Two qualified staff (one of whom is the designated team leader): each holding a Diploma in Community Services (Children Services) or equivalent; and
- one assistant with no qualification requirement.

##### **Where the majority of children are over 3**

- One qualified and designated team leader holding:
  - a Diploma in Community Services (Children Services) or equivalent; or
  - an accredited tertiary course in early childhood care or education;and
- one assistant with no qualification requirement.