

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.

Better staff:child ratios (that is those with fewer children to an adult) result in more positive and frequent interactions between adults and children. The nature of the service is obviously relevant in determining staff:child ratios. School age care services are organised in such a way that not all children are participating in one activity at the same time, or in the same place at the same time. The level and mix of staffing needs to be able to accommodate varied and mixed age groups and the concepts of a less structured program, “safe play” and choice which should characterise school age care services.

The other significant variable which influences the quality of care provided is the level of related training which staff have undertaken. The need for adequate numbers of qualified staff in child care services is based on the recognition of the fact that the care of large groups of children for significant periods of time requires specialist knowledge and skills. Services 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.” (National Association for the Education of Young Children Position Statement on staff qualifications related to quality child care.)

During school age years children begin to look outside the home for guidance and support. Influential adults become sources of new information, skills and points of view, and provide different approaches to life’s challenges and dilemmas. School age children are fascinated by the things adults do and are curious and interested in figuring out as much as they can about adult roles and responsibilities.

Staff in school age care services provide important role models, and therefore can be effective in encouraging worthwhile attitudes and behaviour in children. All staff should be responsible, trustworthy, energetic and confident. Children need to see such adults as resourceful and worth getting to know.

Staffing requirements

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 service 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 clearance and personal references, which should be checked with the referee/s.

Forms for police character 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.

Staffing requirements

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 service is operating; and**
 - e) ensures 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 Children's Services, Environmental and Public Health, ACT Department of Health and Community Care.

ACT Smoke-free Areas (Enclosed Public Places) Act 1994 prohibits smoking in child care premises. This includes the yards of all child care services.

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 a service or camp director/co-ordinator present whenever children are present.**

If the person who usually holds the position, as director/co-ordinator is not present at the venue, either because of an excursion or any other absence, there must be another person designated to be in charge for that time. It is important that the person who acts in the absence of the usual director/co-ordinator, is familiar with the operation of the service and all the licensing requirements.

Also refer to Replacement of absent staff, clause 3.26–3.28.

Staffing requirements

3.6) There must be sufficient primary contact staff throughout the indoor and outdoor areas to ensure that no child is left without adequate supervision.

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

If staff are primarily engaged as contact staff, but are assigned administrative, clerical or other ancillary tasks such as routine cleaning, they are excluded from the minimum staff:child ratio while they are performing those tasks.

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. Sweeping under and around tables or giving the bathroom a quick clean after lunch (in a vacation care program) would be considered to be for the immediate comfort and safety of the children. Routine vacuuming of the room, washing up in the kitchen and similar duties would not.

3.7) The following staffing levels for primary contact staff must be maintained at all times:

- a) at least one staff member for each eleven (or part thereof) children;**
- b) at least one staff member for each eight (or part thereof) children attending a holiday camp; and**
- c) appropriate staffing for excursions as at Clause 3.12.**

As part of the process of applying for a approval in principle or licence, the proprietor must provide a staffing plan for the approval in principle or licence period, outlining how staff will be employed. For vacation care programs and holiday camps, it will need to show how staffing arrangements cover all parts of the day, including staff lunch and tea breaks and preparation and planning time.

3.8) 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:

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

- a) adequate supervision by senior staff occurs at all times; and**
- b) junior staff have a demonstrated and appropriate skill level.**

3.9) The majority of primary contact staff must be adults.

3.10) At least two staff must be present at all times when children are on the premises.

The intention of this requirement is to ensure that any emergency may be handled without the group being left unsupervised, and for the protection and safety of staff and children. Where there are eight or less children attending a before school care program, a

Staffing requirements

3.11) The service or camp director/co-ordinator may be included when calculating staff:child ratios only when it can be demonstrated that he/she is actually engaged in supervising children.

Supervision and staffing levels for excursions and specified activities

3.12) The minimum staffing requirement for excursions is:

a) one staff for each multiple (or part thereof) of eight children;

or

b) one staff for every multiple (or part thereof) of five children when the excursion activity involves swimming at any venue, canoeing, sailing or any other water-based sport.

service may apply for a variation to this requirement, only where it can be demonstrated that an appropriate emergency staff plan is in place and that a qualified adult staff member is present. Any approval for a variation to this clause will be considered on a case by case basis.

Where the director/co-ordinator is involved in administrative tasks, such as receipting monies, bookkeeping, arranging relief staff and enrolling new children, it is considered that the person does not have the capacity to provide direct supervision.

It is strongly recommended that the service director/co-ordinator is provided with sufficient non-contact time to carry out these duties, or that services employ a bookkeeper or other administrative assistant to ensure that the service director/co-ordinator is available for the supervision of staff and children.

An excursion is considered to commence from the time the children leave the centre and finish when they return. The correct staff:child ratio must apply for the duration of the excursion.

Where public transport is used for excursions, it is acceptable for one staff member to follow in a car, so that there is a car available at the excursion venue in case of an emergency.

Provided the staff member is in close proximity to the bus, that person would still be considered to be part of the ratio. However, it is not acceptable for staff members in general to make their way independently to the excursion venue to meet the children there.

All excursions involving swimming or water-based activities must meet this requirement.

Service directors/co-ordinators should obtain from parents a statement of the child's swimming ability before planning any swimming excursion, so that they have relevant information when planning the excursion and the level of staffing required to ensure the safety of all children

When swimming excursions are planned to supervised pools, the pool management should be informed of the time of the excursion and the number of children

Staffing requirements

3.13) There must be a minimum of two staff on excursions at all times.

3.14) There must be sufficient staff on an excursion to ensure that no child is left without adequate supervision.

3.15) There must be at least one staff member on the excursion with a current First Aid Level 2 certificate.

3.16) The majority of staff accompanying the children must be employees of

attending.

Note: *Additional qualification requirements for staff on excursions involving water-based activities are detailed at Clause 3.24.*

This requirement is to ensure that in the case of an emergency, children are not left unattended, and to ensure the safety and protection of staff and children.

Note: *The table at the end of the section on Programming and Planning summarises the requirement for staffing on excursions.*

Parents have every right to expect that their children will be as safe on an excursion as they are when they are in the usual venue.

Excursion supervisors need to have procedures in place to maximise the safety of the children, and to ensure that staff know the whereabouts of all children during the excursion. Such procedures may include a “buddy system”, activities which require the children to report back to a particular staff member at frequent intervals, or frequent whole-group activities where the list of children attending may be checked.

Where the excursion involves activities at significantly hazardous venues, the staff must be especially vigilant. Such activities might include ferry trips, picnics near water, proximity to heavy traffic and crowded or isolated venues.

The supervision of children during vacation care excursions is often made extremely difficult because of the number of programs visiting the same venue at the same time (a swimming pool, Weston Park and the movies are examples). Proprietors and service directors/co-ordinators should provide some means of clearly identifying children in their own program so that they may be easily distinguished from others.

This must be a regular member of staff, not a volunteer.

Also refer to First Aid qualification, clause 3.22 for information on first aid requirements.

Where groups separate, or when some children remain at the usual venue, there must be a person with a first aid certificate with each group.

For excursions/holiday camps only, “staff” may include adult volunteers. Children should be

Staffing requirements

the school age care service for all excursions.

3.17) The majority of staff on all excursions must be adults.

3.18) Where children with additional needs are participating in an excursion:

a) there must be sufficient staff over the minimum staff:child ratio available to ensure the safety and well-being of both the individuals and the group as a whole; and

b) the staffing levels must reflect the amount of additional support needed by the children to ensure that no child is left without adequate supervision.

Qualified staff

3.19) The service must employ a minimum of one qualified staff as per Clause 3.20 for every thirty three (or part thereof) children.

Qualifications

3.20) Positions requiring a qualified person must be filled with an adult holding one of the following qualifications:

- a) a degree or diploma in education;**
- b) a Diploma in Community Services (Children's Services) or equivalent;**
- c) a Diploma in Youth or Recreational Studies; or**
- d) a person who has completed the third year of a Bachelor of Education and who is eligible for an internship with the ACT Department of Education and Community Services.**

3.21) The position of the service or camp director/co-ordinator must be filled by an adult who has attained the age of 21 years, and who holds one of the qualifications listed above in Clause 3.20 or a Graduate Certificate in Child Care Management.

First Aid qualification

3.22) There must be at least one staff member with a current First Aid Level

familiar with the majority of staff on an excursion, and similarly the children should be known to accompanying adults so that they are easily identified.

The phasing-in period for staff other than the co-ordinator is until 1 January 2005, however, services are expected to move towards this standard as they replace staff in the interim period.

The list of qualifications will be reviewed regularly to ensure its relevance to school age care services.

The service director/co-ordinator has the responsibility for supervising staff, ensuring the safety of children, providing an appropriate program and dealing with a range of administrative tasks. Proprietors should ensure that the person they entrust with such responsibility has sufficient experience in school age care services to fulfil this role.

It is essential that certificates are current. In some cases this means that an annual update

Staffing requirements

2 certificate, on the premises at all times when children are present.

- 3.23) There must be at least one staff member with a current First Aid Level 2 certificate on all excursions.**

Qualifications for staff on excursions involving water-based activities

- 3.24) When an excursion involves swimming at rivers, lakes, dams or pools where there are no pool attendants, or any other water based sports, there must be:**

- a) at least one staff member with a Bronze Medallion for each multiple (or part thereof) of ten children; and**
- b) at least one staff member with a current Level 2 First Aid certificate for each multiple (or part thereof) of ten children.**

Documentation

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

Replacement of absent staff

- 3.26) During any absence of the service director/co-ordinator longer than three consecutive working days, a properly qualified person must be employed to fill the position.**

Note: The time limit for absences is different for holiday camps. For replacement of the camp director/co-ordinator in holiday camps, see Clauses 6.12–6.14.

- 3.27) If the absence of the service director/co-ordinator 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 replacement. *Note: The time limit for absences is***

is necessary. For advice on the status of first aid certificates, the organisation issuing certificates should be contacted.

On occasions where there are some children remaining at the service and some away on an excursion, there must be a staff member with a current First Aid certificate with each group.

Water-based activities include but are not limited to canoeing, sailing and wind surfing.

A person who holds both a Bronze Medallion and a current First Aid Level 2 certificate would meet both these requirements.

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

For a short absence, not more than three consecutive days, services may choose to continue without a designated director/co-ordinator (although staff:child ratios must be maintained).

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 service 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.

Staffing requirements

different for holiday camps. For replacement of the camp director/co-ordinator in Holiday camps, see Clauses 6.12–6.14.

3.28) When a person holding a qualified position, (other than the service director/co-ordinator) is absent from the centre for a period longer than one week (five consecutive working days) or from a holiday camp for longer than two consecutive days, that person must be replaced with a person properly qualified as specified in Clause 3.20.

Services are able to fill temporarily vacant positions with unqualified staff for up to one week. However, if the absence will be for a longer period, it is essential that a person with appropriate qualifications is employed to maintain the program.