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Ratios and Effective Supervision

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

- 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 young people and their age, level of development, gender, 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) so as to ensure that it meets current group needs and any other changes (e.g. time of year).

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 guidance documents do set out 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.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework (updated 3rd April 2017) no longer sets out different requirements for minimum ratios during outings from those required on site. As with other age groups, ratios during outings should be determined by risk assessment, which should be reviewed before each outing. The appropriate ratio on an outing is always likely to be higher than the legal minimum (for children aged three and over in early years settings either 1:8 or 1:13 and 1:30 in infant school reception classes in maintained schools). It is not unusual for a ratio of 1:1 to be necessary.

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, young people (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.

There is no absolute requirement for children to be accompanied by staff of the same gender, even on residential, 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.

A useful framework for assessing requirements for ratios and effective supervision is **SAGE**:

- **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, gender, any specific or medical/dietary 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.

You can find further guidance in the documents:

- 3.2d "Approval of Leaders"
- 4.1h "Avoiding Accidents and Emergencies"
- 4.2a "Group Management and Supervision"
- 4.4b "First Aid"
- 4.4i "SEN and Disabled Children".

