



Why Ratios Matter in Child Care Settings

Minnesota sets limits for how many children an adult can care for in child care settings. This supports healthy child development and keeps children safe. Serve and return experiences shape the growing brains of young children. Ideally, when an infant or young child babbles, points, or cries, an adult responds with eye contact, words, or a hug. Just like playing tennis, volleyball, or Ping-Pong, this back-and-forth builds connections in the child’s brain.¹ When adults respond to a young child’s signals, they provide an environment rich in serve and return experiences. An early childhood educator who is overwhelmed with too many children cannot give each child the individual attention they need.

What Research Says About Ratios

Research and national guidance indicate that fewer children per caregiver and smaller group sizes contribute to the health, safety, and development of children, as well as lower stress levels in staff. A summary of available research from Child Trends states that:

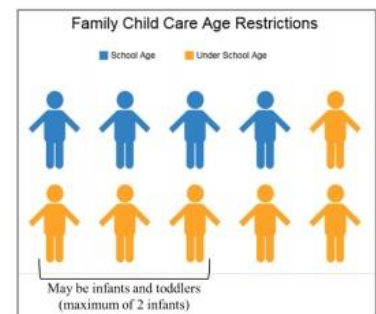
In addition to ensuring that young children are cared for in healthy and safe environments, children who are cared for in ECE settings with lower child-to-staff ratios receive more stimulating and responsive care, and engage in more verbal interactions with their caregivers. Such interactions can foster the secure attachments that are critical for children’s socioemotional well-being and lay the foundation for children’s ability to build healthy relationships in the future. Lower child-to-staff ratios and smaller group sizes have also been associated with children’s positive development, including higher social competence, communication and language skills, and cognitive development.²

While hiring fewer early educators and/or allowing for more children in a child care setting may reduce costs and help alleviate child care shortages in the short term, the costs to children’s positive growth and development may be significant. Children should not bear the burden of inadequate support for Minnesota’s child care system.

Current Minnesota Law Regarding Child Care Ratios

[Current Minnesota Law](#) is in line with national recommendations: family child care may care for up to six children under school-age, with a maximum of two infants, or three infants and toddlers. Ratios are lower for group family child care, or for two adults. Child care centers must follow the ratios depicted in the chart below.

Child Care Center Ratios and Group Sizes, by Age Category		
Age Category	Minimum Staff-to-Child Ratio	Maximum Group Size
Infant	1:4	8
Toddler	1:7	14
Preschooler	1:10	20
School-age child	1:15	30



¹ Harvard Center on the Developing Child. *Serve and Return*. Accessed on 9/17/18 at <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/serve-and-return/>

² Miranda, Brenda. (2017) Higher child-to-staff ratios threaten the quality of child care. Child Trends, Washington, DC. Accessed on 1/20/22 at www.childtrends.org/blog/higher-child-staff-ratios-threaten-quality-child-care.

Temporary Modifications Due to Covid-19

During the Peacetime Emergency, which ended on July 1, 2021, the State of Minnesota made temporary modifications to child care licensing requirements that included minor adjustments to required staffing levels. While these adjustments have been important to maintain capacity during an emergency, as we transition out of the Covid pandemic in the future, requirements should reflect best practices for health and safety, and child development.

Examples of Recommended Child Care Ratios from National Organizations

National Association for Family Child Care Accreditation Standards

1. A qualified assistant is present when there are more than six children in care, and no more than 12 children are in care at any one time.
2. When there are six or fewer children present, no more than two are under age two. When there are seven or more children present, no more than four are under age two.

National Association for the Education of Young Children

1. In centers and classrooms, the recommended educator to child ratio is Infants, 1:4; Toddlers, 1:6; and Preschoolers, 1:10.

Early Head Start-Family Child Care Partnerships

1. With one provider: A maximum group size of six with no more than two children under age two.
2. With two providers: A maximum group size of 12 with no more than four children under age two

American Academy of Pediatrics Recommendations

1. Small Family Child Care: A maximum group size of six with no more than two children under age two.
2. Large Family Child Care: A maximum group size of 6-12, depending on the age of the children.
3. Child Care Centers: A maximum group size of 6 - 16 depending on the age of the children, with ratios ranging from 3:1 for infants to 8:1 for 5-year-olds.