

Frequently Asked Questions – Childminder ratios

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework sets the staff:child ratios for all early years providers and childminders.

In response to a number of queries, 4Children has produced these FAQs, based on advice from the Department for Education. We hope childminders find them helpful when making their own professional judgements, alongside the requirements in EYFS.

Please note that these FAQs do not replace or change the staff:child ratio requirements in the EYFS which remain the same.

Can an individual childminder ever care for more than six children under the age of eight?

No. At any one time, childminders may care for a maximum of six children under the age of eight. This number includes the childminder's own children or any other children for whom they are responsible such as, for example, those being fostered.

Must a childminder's own children always be included in the ratios?

Yes, unless they do not have care of their own children during the time they are minding other children (e.g. when the child is at school or with another childcare provider). The maximum number of six children that a childminder can care for must include the childminder's own children. If for any reason the arrangements made to care for their own child fails, the childminder must still maintain the correct ratios.

Twins and ratios - If a childminder only has one space left can he/she take on twins?

No. The ratio cap for a childminder can never exceed six children, even if there is a continuity of care request in relation to caring for twins. The 1:6 ratio must always take priority for safety and welfare reasons. Any provider who exceeds the maximum number of six children at any one time is operating in breach of the requirements of registration. This is likely to affect the outcome of an Ofsted inspection.

What are the rules on caring for children within the 1:6 ratio cap?

Of the maximum number of six children that a childminder can care for, a maximum of three may be young children, i.e. a child up until 1st September following his or her fifth birthday. There should only be one child under the age of one.

Can there ever be exceptions to the above ratios within the overall 1:6 ratio?

In certain circumstances the EYFS allows for some modifications or flexibility within the overall 1:6 childminder ratio. This is to allow for the needs of children and their families to continue to be met as far as safety and welfare rules allow.

Is there a list of exceptional circumstances in relation to employing childminder ratios with the 1:6 overall ratio?

No. However the EYFS says that exceptions to the usual ratios may be made, for example when childminders are caring for sibling babies, or when caring for their own baby. If children aged four and five only attend the childminding setting before and/or after a normal school day, and/or during school holidays, they may be cared for at the same time as three other young children. These illustrated exceptions are not exhaustive examples. Any exceptions to ratios adopted by the childminder (for whatever reason) are subject to the childminder demonstrating to parents and carers and to Ofsted on inspection or their childminder agency - that the individual needs of all children are being met consistently. Where a childminder takes advantage of an exception to ratios and is unable to evidence that all children's needs continue to be met they must revert back to the standard ratios as described in paragraphs 3.41.

What are the rules governing ratios when a childminder works with an assistant?

If a childminder works with an assistant or another childminder, then they may increase the number of children they can care for up to a maximum of 12 children. When working with an assistant or another childminder, each adult cannot exceed the childminder ratio, which is 1:6 and within the age range ratios stipulated in paragraph 3.41 of the EYFS, unless exceptional circumstances apply as outlined earlier. The childminder will need to take into consideration the amount of physical space available and there may be local planning restrictions to be taken into account.

When working with an assistant or another childminder the adults must ensure that all children's needs continue to be met during all periods of the day. If one of the adults is dealing with the needs of individual or small groups of children, it is not acceptable for the other adult to be left for long periods of the day with more than six children.

We understand the assistant can only be left alone for two hours. If a childminder has different children in the morning and the afternoon, can they have 2 hours for the morning and 2 hours for the afternoon?

No, Paragraph 3.43 of the EYFS states that: 'Children may be left in the sole care of childminders' assistants for 2 hours at most in a single day.' The 2 hour limit is linked to the overall provision and not individual children.