

PSCWA have recently received some questions from educators working in OSHC services in relation to child to staff ratios on excursions. To alleviate any concerns and confusion, we would like to provide further explanation that has been formulated in conjunction with the Department for Communities.

The National Law requires that the relevant educator to child ratios must be maintained at all times (Section 169).

In the Guide to the Education and Care Services National Law and the Education and Care Services National Regulations (page 70) it states

‘While an increased educator to child ratio for excursions is not specified in the National Regulations, there is a requirement to adequately supervise children at all times. A thorough risk assessment should determine whether minimum ratios are sufficient to provide adequate supervision while attending an excursion.’

For further information please refer to the

National Law: 165, 165A, 167, 169

National Regulations 99, 100, 101, 102, 168 (g).
--

Risk assessing an excursion

Regulation 100 requires that a risk assessment be conducted before an excursion is undertaken. The risk assessment will identify and assess risks that the excursion may pose to the safety, health or wellbeing of any child being taken on the excursion, and detail strategies for minimising and managing those risks.

There is a sample excursion risk management plan and a risk assessment matrix in the Guide to the National Law and Regulations (P 172 & 173 that support services to make decisions around the risks associated with planned excursions. They are samples and provide only the minimum information required. We would recommend staff add to the form depending on the excursion type.

Completing the risk assessment allows services to consider

- The reasons for the excursion and its relationship with the programme and learning outcomes for children
- the proposed route and destination for the excursion
- any water hazards and risks associated with water based activities
- the method of transport
- the number of adults and children involved in the excursion
- given the risk/s posed, the number of educators or other responsible adults that is appropriate to provide supervision and whether any specialised skills are required to ensure children’s safety

- the proposed activities
- the likely length of time of the excursion
- the items that should be taken on the excursion.

For example If a service was taking a group of school age children to the zoo, they would first ensure a ratio of 1:10 was met, and then when completing their risk assessment they might ask themselves questions such as:

- 'Are there any water hazards present?'
- 'Are any children with additional needs going to be attending the excursion?'
- 'What are we going to be doing at the zoo?'
- Location of toilets?

After conducting a risk assessment services will be required to determine if any additional educators or other responsible adults are needed and if any of these people require specialized skills such as lifesaving qualifications. There is section in the excursion management plan where staff can detail their decisions on child to staff ratios.

Q. If we decide we need more responsible adults on an excursion can we still use parents and volunteers to make up the numbers of additional adults required?

A. Yes. It is important for the Nominated Supervisor to ensure that all volunteers are given the necessary briefing before they leave on the excursion on the expectations of the service in relation to supervision, any medical issues such as allergies that any of the children may have and also that that volunteers or students cannot take any of the children out of sight range of staff.

A few tips are:

- ✓ It is important to check that you have all the relevant details of the responsible adults joining you on the excursion.
- ✓ Volunteers are over and above the staff to child ratio.
- ✓ Regulation 149 requires that adequate records are kept of any volunteers or students who participate.