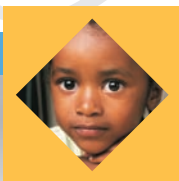




Quality

Primary Caregivers and Continuity of Care



Because babies and toddlers learn in the context of one-on-one relationships, the most important ingredient in high quality child care is the relationship between the caregiver and the child and his or her family. After parents, professional caregivers in homes and centers have the next largest impact on the developing child. A professional caregiver who develops a warm and stable relationship with a child and the child's family can have a lasting, positive impact on the child's life.

What do babies need in child care settings?

Babies and toddlers in group child care programs have very different needs than preschool children. While preschoolers are ready to engage in group activities and practice social skills, babies and toddlers need individualized care. The best way to provide individualized care is to create an environment where caregivers can get to know children well and learn how to best meet their needs as they grow. There are three structural elements that promote individualized care in infant and toddler settings: small groups, primary caregiving and continuity of care.

Small groups

Small groups allow more time for caregivers to interact with individual children and keep group noise and confusion to a minimum. While NYS regulations set a lower adult child ratio and smaller group size than many other states, the best practices recommendations of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and Zero to Three are still lower.

New York State Regulations

	Adult child ratio	Group size
Infants	1:4	8
Toddlers - if group size is 10	1:5	10
Toddlers - if group size is 12	1:4	12

Best Practices Recommendations

	Adult child ratio	Group size
Young infants	1:3	6
Mobile infants	1:3	9
Toddlers	1:4	12

Primary caregiving assignments

This strategy aligns each caregiver with a smaller group of children for whom she is primarily responsible. This arrangement already exists in family day care homes. In center based care and group family day care homes it reduces the number of children that each caregiver needs to know intimately. The primary caregiver is responsible for observing the child and getting to know her individual needs. She makes plans for the child and conducts most of the caregiving routines. She also forms a close working relationship with the family through ongoing communication. Both caregivers in a room work together to meet the needs of all children but each caregiver tunes into a smaller group of primary relationships.

Continuity

Through close caregiving relationships, bonds are formed between caregivers and children and their families. It is difficult for children to separate from caregivers who provide security and daily comfort. Many programs move children from room to room, "graduating" them to the next level when they reach developmental milestones. These transitions cause heartache for children and caregivers and require children to form new attachments with new caregivers. Best practice recommends maintaining the relationships that children form and changing the environment as children grow and need new challenges. Some programs move caregivers and children together into new rooms and some simply change the equipment over time. By maintaining relationships, children are able to stay with caregivers who know them well and know how to meet their needs while providing new challenges.

NYS Regulations for Family Child Care Homes

Family home One provider	No more than 2 children under age 2	When infants are enrolled the maximum number of children is 5
Group family home Provider and assistants	No more than 2 children under age 2	When infants are enrolled the maximum number of children is 10



New York State Child Care Coordinating Council
230 Washington Avenue Extension Albany, NY 12203
Phone: (518) 690-4217 Fax: (518) 690-2887

This material was developed by the New York State Child Care Coordinating Council through a contract with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.

Design work by Michael Orr and Associates, Corning, New York

