

How is Group Size Defined in the Field of Early Care and Education?

BrightStars uses the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) definition of group size which is: "the number of children assigned for most of the day to a teacher or teaching team who occupy a well-defined space that prevents intermingling of children from different groups". NAEYC further clarifies that "group sizes stated are ceilings, regardless of the number of staff". This clarification defines group size as an indicator of quality, independent of the staff to child ratio.

What are current group size recommendations?

Many leading organizations specializing in the care and education of young children have published recommendations for group size maximums in child care and preschool settings. Below is a summary of some of those recommendations.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the following group sizes:

Age	Group Size
Birth - 12 months	6
13 - 30 months	8
31- 35 months	10
3 year olds	14
4 year olds	16
5 year olds	16

NAEYC recommends the following for maximum group size:

Age	Group Size
Infants: 6 weeks - 15 months	8
Toddlers: 12 months-3 years	12
3 year olds	18
4 year olds	20
5 year olds	24

*Rhode Island Child Day Care Licensing Regulations require the following group size maximums:**

Age	Group Size
Infants: 6 weeks - 18 months	8
Toddlers: 18 months - 3 years	12
3 year olds	18
4 year olds	20
5 year olds	24

*RI licensing further clarifies group size by stating that, when age groups are mixed, "programs serving mixed age groupings shall meet the ...group size requirements for the younger age if that younger age group comprises more than 20% of the group". (State of Rhode Island, Department of Children, Youth and Families).

How does BrightStars assess group size?

BrightStars uses the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families Child Day Care Licensing regulations as a guide for group size assessment.

All programs participating in BrightStars must meet these licensing standards for group size, with physical barriers separating the groups of children. Programs at all star levels must also post the maximum group size for each group of children. Parents in initial focus groups during the development of BrightStars standards expressed the desire to be able to clearly determine the maximum amount of children allowed in their child's classroom.

Programs achieving 4 and 5 star ratings meet stricter group size requirements (based on the age of the youngest child in the group). Programs achieving a 5 star rating meet stricter group divider requirements (one group of children per room).

Why is group size considered an important indicator of quality early care and education?

Research shows that group size significantly impacts the quality of a child's experience in group care.

- Group size significantly affects health and safety issues, such as transmission of disease and caregiver behaviors related to the safety of children.
- Children form more secure attachments in smaller groups. Secure attachments create the foundation for brain development which impacts all areas of development. Attached children tend to be more advanced in their play, less aggressive and withdrawn, and more socially competent than children who are insecurely attached.
- Caregivers with small groups are more actively involved and spend more time interacting with children; they are more responsive, more socially stimulating, and less restrictive than caregivers in larger groups.
- Children who are in larger groups tend to receive less individual attention. Less individual attention in group care settings has been linked to lower acquired knowledge on specific child assessment scales.
- Noise and activity levels in larger classrooms impact a child's ability to focus and self-regulate, two abilities that impact a child's stress level and conditions for optimal development.
- Research suggests that children in smaller groups are more cooperative, compliant, and exhibit more reflection/innovation than children in larger groups, therefore decreasing behavior issues and increasing capacity to learn.
- Small group sizes are consistently correlated with improved interactions among staff and children and more positive interactions between children
- Smaller group size is associated with more developmentally appropriate classroom activities.

Resources:

Caring for Our Children: Second Addition. American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), The American Public Health Association (APHA), and National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care. 2002.

NAEYC Accreditation Performance Criteria (2008), "Teacher Child Ratios within Group Size".

NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (1996). Characteristics of infant childcare: Factors contributing to positive care giving. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 11, 269-306.

Schumacher, R. Center Ratios and Group Sizes. *Charting Progress for Babies in Child Care Research Based Rationale*. CLASP. 2008.

ZERO TO THREE (2008). *Caring for infants & Toddlers in Groups* (2nd edition). Washington: DC.