



What you Need to Know about Multi-Age Grouping in Early Childhood Development Settings

What is Multi-Age Grouping?

In early childhood settings, the term “multi-age grouping” refers to programs in which there is a mix of infants, toddlers, pre-schoolers, and school-age children in the same group. Multi-age grouping is an alternative to grouping children according to their ages.

Multi-age grouping is one of the elements of quality described in BC Aboriginal Child Care Society’s *Statement on Quality Child Care*:

“The segregation of children on the basis of age is contrary to Aboriginal cultural values and traditions. Multi-age groups more closely resemble life in an extended family. Multi-age child care allows strong attachments between educators and young children to continue from infancy through to school-age. In multi-age programs, younger children are

helped by and learn from older children. Exceptional children can be more easily included in multi-age groups since the learning environments are designed for children with a wide range of abilities. With appropriate staff preparation and adult-child ratios, multi-age grouping is a safe delivery option.”



BC Aboriginal
Child Care Society

This resource sheet was developed by the British Columbia Aboriginal Child Care Society (BCACCS) in response to findings of the 2013 research project *Licensing First Nations’ Early Childhood Programs*. Some early childhood programs licensed for age-segregated groups were experiencing challenges with that model. The information that follows clarifies the regulations related to grouping and explains how programs can be licensed for multi-age groups. ©2014



Can children of different ages be grouped together for special cultural events?

Group sizes, age compositions, and staffing levels must be maintained if special cultural events are held in licensed early childhood facilities. Exemptions are not permitted from the group size and age composition limits specified in Schedule E of the **CCLR**.

However, early childhood programs can take children to special events such as ceremonies, celebrations, and feasts held off-site. Attending a special cultural event in the community is like any other field trip and prior approval of licensing officers is not required. Field trips provide opportunities for the children in your programs to interact with children of different ages.

Does the Child Care Licensing Regulation allow multi-age grouping?

Yes. Since 2007 the **Child Care Licensing Regulation (CCLR)** has allowed early childhood settings to be licensed for “multi-age child care.” Programs with multi-age licenses need not deliver all-day child care services. Part-time child development programs can be licensed for multi-age groups. The maximum number of children allowed in a single multi-age group is 8. An early childhood facility offering services to more than 8 children might have several multi-age rooms.

The **CCLR** also allows “in-home multi-age child care.”

One educator is required for each multi-age group. No more than 3 children can be younger than 36 months old. Only one child can be younger than 12 months old.

The **CCLR** also allows facilities licensed for age-segregated groups to combine children of different ages for early arrivals and late departures. Section 34 of the **CCLR** permits children of different ages to be together during the half hour before the programs begin and the half hour after the programs end. A total of 8 or fewer children of different ages can be grouped together before and after the child care program as long as no more than 3 of the children are younger than 36 months old. One early childhood educator or assistant can supervise each group of 8 children during these times.

With the exception of programs licensed for multi-age groups and the half hour before and after age-specific programs, the **CCLR** requires children of different ages to be grouped separately.

Are exemptions permitted?

Currently, no exemptions are allowed to the maximum multi-age group size of 8 children. Requests for exemptions for the age composition of multi-age groups may be considered by licensing officers. First Nations and Aboriginal communities would find it beneficial if future changes to the **CCLR** provide additional options for licensed programs to group children of different ages. Additional options are needed so early childhood programs can meet unique community needs and reflect cultural values.

Can licensed facilities reorganize and provide multi-age programs?

Yes. Existing age-segregated facilities considering converting their programs to multi-age should contact their licensing officers and discuss the process to be followed to obtain multi-age child care licenses.

Depending on community needs, an early childhood facility might choose to have one or more multi-age groups in addition to age-segregated groups.



Why consider establishing multi-age grouping?

In addition to the advantages identified in the Statement on Quality Child Care, multi-age groups offer these benefits:

- Siblings and cousins and friends of different ages do not have to be separated.
- Particularly in small rural, coastal, and remote communities, grouping children on the basis of age is impractical.
- Multi-age groups provide additional opportunities for children to experience mutual assistance and sharing. Cooperative relationships are an element of quality Aboriginal early childhood programs.
- Many parents who have two or more children appreciate the convenience of one-stop multi-age programs.
- Programs that find it difficult to recruit infant and toddler educators to work with groups under the age of 36 months may find staffing easier. The **CCLR** does not require early childhood educators in multi-age groups to have infant and toddler credentials.

What factors impact the delivery of multi-age programs?

Physical space:

Facilities presently licensed for age-segregated programs might require renovations to accommodate multiple multi-age programs. These changes have budget implications. Facilities can also apply for exemptions.

Furnishings:

Multi-age programs require different furniture, equipment, play materials, and supplies than age-segregated programs. Furnishing programs to meet the interests and needs of children from infants to school-age has budget implications.

Training:

There is a gap between the needs of early childhood personnel in centres wishing to offer multi-age programs and the training offered by educational institutions in British Columbia. Although the CCLR now permits multi-age programs, the curricula of the recognized educational institutions continue to focus on preparing students for employment in age-segregated programs.

Group size and composition:

The **CCLR** states that each multi-age group may include no more than 8 children, with only one under the age of 12 months and no more than 3 under the age of 36 months. This may or may not be a good fit with the needs of the families in your community. Exemptions may be considered for the age composition of multi-age groups.

Working conditions for early childhood educators:

Although the **CCLR** allows one early childhood educator to care for 8 children in multi-age groups, this ratio may be difficult for staff. In addition, some educators working with multi-age groups report feelings of isolation and prefer the teamwork that characterizes working with larger groups of children.



Resources

Child Care Licensing Regulation:

http://www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/ID/freeside/332_2007

See Schedule E for a summary of allowed group sizes and compositions.

What does the research say about multi-age grouping for infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers?

http://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/Multi-age_BN_Feb_12_14_0.pdf

The case for multi-age grouping in early education:

<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED326302.pdf>

BC First Nations early childhood development framework:

<http://www.fnesc.ca/Attachments/ECD/ECD%20Consultation%20Document%20Dec%202017%202009.pdf>

See Appendix B, pages 38-44 "BC Aboriginal Child Care Society Statement on Quality Child Care"

Some benefits of multi-age grouping:

http://www.uwyo.edu/ecec/_files/documents/multi-age-benefits.pdf

On-line course: Managing mixed age groups in a child care setting:

<http://www.childcarelounge.com/training/managing-mixed-age-groups.php>

Note: The enrollment fee is US\$20. Early childhood educators who complete this course and receive a certificate can use it to meet the professional development requirements of the British Columbia ECE Registry.

Where can I view/download the resource sheet?

Visit http://www.acc-society.bc.ca/files_2/accs-publications.php

Where can I learn more?

Visit <http://portal.acc-society.bc.ca/>



and check out the links in our resources section



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