

# British Gymnastics

## Health, Safety and Welfare Policy - Coach/Teacher Ratios

### 3.6 Gymnast to Coach/Teacher Ratios:

There are a number of diverse factors to consider when making recommendations with regard to the ratio of participants to coach/teacher in Gymnastics and Trampolining activities.

These factors might include; the age and stage of development of the participants, the level and type of activity, the experience of the participants and coach and the type of facility and equipment available.

However, the coach in charge must always make a risk assessment of each situation and must determine a ratio of participants to coach/es which is reasonable, safe and effective.

There should always be at least three people present in the gymnasium, two of whom must be adult, one of which must be suitably qualified to the level of the participants.

To ensure that a safe and effective coaching/teaching situation is maintained, British Gymnastics recommends the following reasonable ratio of participants to coach/teacher:

#### • Pre-School Classes

For independent child classes, a ratio of eight participants to one coach is recommended. This can be increased proportionally to the number of qualified assistant coaches, i.e: 8 per additional directly supervised assistant coach.

For classes where the parent, guardian or carer are participating with the child, a maximum ratio of 20 children to one coach is recommended.

#### • Gymnastics Classes

All gymnastics activities must be supervised by suitable qualified British Gymnastics coaches or teachers. Coaches must be qualified to the level of performance of the participants in the specific discipline of the sport.

The recommended maximum number of participants to one apparatus/station, is 8 participants.

Where more than one apparatus/station is to be supervised, the coach in charge must carefully assess the following:

- The age, stage of development, experience, varying ability, and number and discipline of the participants.
- The coaches' own qualifications and experience.
- Their ability to observe, advise, support and respond to the difficulties of anyone in the gymnastics area.
- The level and type of activity and suitability of the apparatus arrangements.

Normally, one coach would not be expected to supervise more than 16 gymnasts, without other suitably qualified coaches being in attendance.

However, where a directly supervised and qualified Assistant Coach is used, in addition to the supervising coach, each additional Assistant Coach may supervise a maximum of 8 participants. (e.g: qualified lead coach: 16 gymnasts plus 8 gymnasts with AC = 24 in total).

#### • Trampolinist to Coach Ratios

All trampolining activities must be supervised by suitably qualified British Gymnastics coaches or teachers. It is incumbent upon the coach in charge to ensure that trained spotters of suitable size are provided at each side not protected by alternative safety measures such as end decks.

The recommended maximum number of participants to one trampoline is eight participants.

Where more than one trampoline is to be supervised, the coach in charge must carefully assess the following:

- The age, stage of development, experience, varying ability, and number and discipline of the participants.
- The coaches' own qualifications and experience. Their ability to observe, advise, support and respond to the difficulties of anyone in the trampoline area.

Normally, one coach would not be expected to supervise more than 16 recreational trampolinists, without other suitably qualified coaches being in attendance.

The coach in charge must also ensure that the person/s sliding in the "push in mat", if not a qualified coach, is trained, experienced, of sufficient maturity and familiar with the performer.

#### • Coaching People with a Disability

When working with people with disabilities, a competent assessment of the risk to the individual participants must be made when determining the ratio of gymnast to coach. This may rise from 2:1 through to 8:1 depending upon the disability.

#### • General Comment

When groups are warming up, cooling down or working on low risk activities on a floor area, the ratio may be increased within the bounds of safety.

### AGE RELATED GUIDELINES

#### i) Age and Level of Participation

It is impossible to legislate for every conceivable situation in gymnastics and trampolining, since there are many variables to consider. However this statement provides some guidelines, which British Gymnastics consider to be appropriate to the safe participation and long term development of the gymnasts and trampolinists.

Factors which influenced the guidelines include: the chronological age of the child, physical and psychological age characteristics, gender and stage of development of the participant. Consideration must also be given to the type of activity, suitability of the facility, and the needs and desires of the participants.

The levels of ability and aspirations of the participants should be of paramount importance when the level of participation is determined. It is possible to commence gymnastics participation at any stage, but the possible lack of flexibility, strength ability and spatial awareness may be debilitating factors with regard to high level performance. In addition, participants should undertake gymnastics at a level at which it is safe for them to participate.

It is generally recognised that it takes eight to twelve years to successfully prepare an international gymnast and that the best age to commence a gymnastics programme is between 5 – 6 years old. The connective tissue in children between the ages of 5 – 10 years does not possess the crossbridging of the adult fibres and is more readily and safely stretched to improve flexibility. Commencement at an early age also enables a good work ethic and appropriate attitude to be formulated to prepare the young participant for future development.

The following outlines what British Gymnastics considers would normally be a safe and appropriate programme for the development of a talented gymnast with aspirations towards high levels of competitive gymnastics.

Up to 5 years old: Pre-school Gymnastics and Fundamental movement programme progressing from 1 to 2 hrs per week, in which the child participates in structured play and develops motor control skills and basic movement patterns.

Stage 1: Preliminary Phase: The development of basic foundation preparation and core movement skills. Maximum recommended par-

ticipation at this stage – 8 hrs per week and not more than 2 hrs per session.

Stage 2: Basic Specialisation: Multilateral physical preparation and basic skill/element acquisition up to 10 hrs per week.

Stage 3: Secondary Specialisation: Initial specialised physical preparation related to the gymnastics activity and combinations of basic gymnastics skills/elements – up to 15 hrs per week.

Stage 4: Tertiary Specialisation: Specialised physical preparation and the acquisition of more advanced skills up to 20 hrs per week.

Stage 5: Advanced Specialisation: Further physical preparation and acquisition of high skill levels and performance development (up to 25 hrs per week).

Stage 6: High Performance: Advanced physical preparation and attainment of High Performance levels and complex skills. (up to 30 hrs per week).

When planning the training programme and number of training hours, a coach must pay particular regard to the maturation age, stage of development of each individual and also the intensity and variety of activity. This is particularly relevant where there are mixed aged partnerships or groups.

The guidelines for recommended maximum training hours will vary considerably in respect of the other gymnastics disciplines and may be substantially lower – particularly where there are fewer apparatus in that discipline i.e. tumbling or trampolining.

Participants may enter the programme at any age, but the stages of development will predominately remain the same as that described above. Gymnasts following a recreational or non-high performance programme would not follow the intensive programme outlined above and would train proportionally fewer hours according to their needs.

## ii) Age and Competition

Competition is an integral part of gymnastics and the performance gymnast must gain experience in competition to enable him/her to attain high levels of achievement in events. British Gymnastics does not encourage participation in events leading to National Competitions until the age of eight years. However, it is recognised that it is a natural trait of children to want to challenge themselves and others and the British Gymnastics proficiency reward schemes and club/class competitions are often utilised to meet this need.

The world governing body for gymnastics, The Federation Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG) has ruled that a gymnast must be aged at least 16 in the year of competition in order to compete at full senior international level. This action was designed to discourage the accelerated development of younger talented gymnasts and thereby extend the competitive career of the gymnast. This is more relevant to the female gymnasts, since the male gymnast is not likely to achieve maturation strength until around 18 years and is therefore unlikely to compete at senior level at a young age.

In order that the gymnast gains the valuable knowledge and experience of competition, it is recommended that the following strategy for the number of competitions per year for each stage of development be adopted:

Stage 3	8 – 11 years	4 – 6 competitions per year
Stage 4	11 – 14 years	6 – 8 competitions per year
Stage 5	14 – 16 years	8 – 10 competitions per year
Stage 6	16+ years	6 – 7 competitions per year

However, the prudent coach will plan the training and event programme according to the maturation age, the experience and needs of the individual as well as the level or intensity of the event.