HOW TO SET YOUR FACILITY'S RATIO

Your staff-to-dog ratio checklist

7 steps, broken into actions you can tick off

1 Find your legal floor

That number is non-negotiable.

- [ ] Look up your state's daycare and boarding rules
  Colorado and Iowa cap playgroups at 1:15. North Carolina requires 1:10.
- [ ] Check city and county kennel ordinances
  Home-based businesses often face caps of 3 to 5 dogs
- [ ] Confirm your zoning allows your planned headcount
- [ ] Write down your legal maximum
  Treat it as your floor, not your target
- [ ] In Massachusetts, watch for final Ollie's Law rules

2 Separate your service lines

Daycare and boarding need different ratios.

- [ ] Set one ratio for group play
- [ ] Set a separate ratio for kenneled boarding
  Often about 1:20 for care rounds
- [ ] Count boarders in the play yard toward the playgroup ratio
  Even at 6 a.m.

3 Target 1:10, treat 1:15 as your ceiling

Where community consensus and most regulations land.

- [ ] Make 1:10 your everyday target
- [ ] Never go past 1:15 in a playgroup
- [ ] Go tighter for higher-need groups
  Many operators use 1:6 to 1:8 for puppies, seniors, mixed sizes, and high-energy large dogs

4 Build groups first, then staff them

When groups are designed well, the ratio takes care of itself.

- [ ] Split dogs by size and temperament
- [ ] Set a rotation of timed play blocks
  Often 20 to 40 minutes each
- [ ] Assign a fixed handler to each group
- [ ] Check your active play space
  Operators use 75 to 100 sq ft per dog. Iowa requires 50, England about 65.

5 Adjust for your team

It's not an exact dog-to-human equation.

- [ ] Give new staff smaller groups during onboarding
- [ ] Loosen ratios only as skills are proven
  Handlers who read body language early can safely manage more
- [ ] Count only people actually on the floor
  The person on the front desk isn't supervising dogs

6 Cap bookings at what you can staff

Peaks break ratios, not averages.

- [ ] Find your peak hour
  Usually morning drop-off, 7 to 9 a.m.
- [ ] Calculate your daily capacity
  Ratio × handlers on the floor at peak. For example, 1:10 × 3 handlers = 30 dogs.
- [ ] Set a hard daily cap in your booking system
  Enforce it at booking, not at the door
- [ ] Turn away bookings past the cap
  One serious incident costs far more than a lost booking

7 Write it down and share it

A published ratio is a selling point.

- [ ] Put your ratio in writing for your team
- [ ] Publish it for pet parents
  A specific number beats vague reassurance