

Affordable Child Care Programs for Resource Families in California

Can I get free or low-cost child care for the child I am caring for?

Yes! If you are a:

- Resource Parent (formerly known as a foster parent, approved relative or approved non-relative extended family member), or other type of caregiver of a child who is in out-of-home care
- Parent whose child lives with you and receives child protective services, or is at risk of abuse, neglect, or exploitation, or
- Youth or young adult in foster care with your own child

you should get affordable child care. Affordable child care is also called a “child care subsidy.”

What affordable child care programs are out there?



1. CalWORKs Child Care
2. Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Children in Foster Care
3. Department of Education General Child Care
4. California State Preschool
5. Head Start and Early Head Start
6. Other Affordable Child Care Programs

Learn about each affordable child care program starting on the next page.

How do I get affordable child care?

Visit your local Child Care Resource & Referral agency to find out what affordable child care program(s) you qualify for, how to choose the best child care for you, and how to sign up.

Find the Resource & Referral in your community, by

 calling 1-800-543-7793 or  going to www.rrnetwork.org/find_child_care.

If you are getting CalWORKs cash assistance, ask your CalWORKs worker for child care. You can use [this form](#) to ask for CalWORKs child care.

If you received CalWORKs cash assistance or a diversion payment in the last 2 years, you can still get CalWORKs child care. Ask your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency about CalWORKs child care.

Do I pay anything for affordable child care?

It depends on your family’s situation and the type of child care program you choose. You may have to pay a family fee or a copayment, but it will be a lot less than the full cost of child care.

FAMILY FEES

As families make more money, they usually must pay for a share of cost of the child care. These are called family fees and will never be more than 9% of your family’s income.

A family whose child receives protective services, or are abused, neglected, or exploited, or at-risk of abuse, neglect, or exploitation may not have to pay a family fee for that child for up to twelve months.

If you are caring for someone who is not your biological or adopted child, and you have a family fee, only the child’s income will count for determining the amount of the fee.

You **cannot** be charged a family fee if:

- Anyone in your family is getting CalWORKs cash assistance
- Your child is in Head Start
- Your child is in part-time state preschool
- Your child receives services from the Severely Disabled Program

COPAYMENTS

If you choose a child care provider who charges a fee that is more than the most that the agency will pay for

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your voucher, then you must pay for the extra cost as a copayment directly to the child care provider.

If you have a state preschool or child care center space that is subsidized, or Head Start, then you will not be charged a copayment.

What kinds of child care settings are available?

Licensed family child care home

Family child care homes offer a warm environment, located in the provider's home. Many meet the cultural and linguistic needs of families.

- A small family child care home cares for up to 6-8 children
- A large family child care home has an assistant and cares for up to 12-14 children.

Family child care homes are licensed by the California Department of Social Services and must meet health, safety, and fire requirements. Many also meet child development requirements.

Licensed child care center

Child care centers generally care for larger groups of children than family child care homes. They are usually located in a building located in your community or at a local elementary school. Child care centers are licensed and must meet health, safety and fire requirements. All must meet developmental requirements.

Family, friend and neighbor care (FFN care)

Family, friend and neighbor (FFN) providers include grandparents, aunts and uncles, older siblings, friends, neighbors, and others who help families by providing child care. FFN care is generally unlicensed. They may only care for one families' children, as well as their own children. If you are paying for FFN care with a child care subsidy, then many times the person caring for your child must register with Trustline, California's criminal background check program.

Other Types of Unlicensed Child Care

Other types of child cares include after-school programs, day camps, parent cooperative care, and other types of recreational programs. You can pay for this type of care with a child care subsidy so long as the

people caring for your child have registered with Trustline, California's criminal background check program.

If the child in your care is involved with Child Protective Services (CPS), you will need to check with the child's social worker about whether your county allows your child to be cared for in unlicensed care.

1. CalWORKs Child Care

WHO QUALIFIES


CalWORKs child care is for families, resource parents or other caregivers who receive or received CalWORKs cash assistance or a diversion payment within the past 2 years. If you have this connection to the CalWORKs program, you can get CalWORKs child care for any child who is living with you and you are responsible for.

To get CalWORKs child care, you must be working, looking for work, getting training, going to school, or doing an activity that addresses family needs (such as counseling, housing search or medical appointments). You can also get CalWORKs child care if you do not have a home, are looking for work, or cannot take care of your child because you have a physical or mental health condition.

HOW TO GET IT

You can ask your CalWORKs worker for child care. You should get immediate and stable child care once you are approved for CalWORKs cash assistance and are doing, or plan to do, a CalWORKs activity. Ask your worker for the full list of activities that you can do to get CalWORKs child care. You can ask for child care any time you need it. You can use [this form](#) to ask for child care:

Tip: Ask your CalWORKs worker for child care as soon as you need it, because you can only get reimbursed for up to 30 days of child care payments before the date you requested child care.

 **It's best to do this in writing.**

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HOW IT WORKS:

As soon as you are approved for CalWORKs cash assistance, you should get it right away and not be put on a child care waiting list. If you are receiving CalWORKs cash assistance, or received cash assistance or a diversion payment within the last 2 years, you should get approved immediately for child care.

CalWORKs child care has three stages: Stage One, Stage Two, and Stage Three. Your child care should continue without you losing it through these stages, from the time you first enroll in cash assistance, while you are in school or working, and as your income goes up – so long as you need child care and your income doesn't go over 85% of the state median income (\$73,885 for a family of three in 2020).

CalWORKs child care payments are in the form of a voucher that you can use to pay the child care provider or center you choose to take care of your child. The local Child Welfare Agency or Alternative Payment Program paying for your CalWORKs child care usually makes the voucher payment directly to the person or child care center providing child care.

Parents, Resource Parents, and Caregivers: If you receive or received CalWORKs cash assistance in the last 2 years, and you cannot get child care, contact us by filling out our online intake form:

www.childcarelaw.org/help

Attorneys: If your client is a resource parent, a family experiencing homelessness, or is or was getting CalWORKs cash assistance, and was denied child care, please fill out our online intake form:

www.childcarelaw.org/help.

HOW LONG IT LASTS

You get CalWORKs child care without losing it or having to report any changes in your situation for at least 12 months. The only exception is if your family's income goes above 85% of the state median income. If your family's income is above 85% of the state median income, then you must report this income to the agency where you get your child care to see if you still qualify.

As long as you continue to qualify for CalWORKs child care, you will get it until the next time you certify your child care after your child turns 13 years old. If your child has a disability, you may get child care until your child is 21 years old.

2. CDE General Child Care

The California Department of Education General Child Care and Development program, also called, "CDE General Child Care."

WHO QUALIFIES

In the California Department of Education General Child Care and Development Program, you qualify if your family

- Has a child who is
 - Receiving child protective services, or
 - Identified as abused, neglected, or exploited, or
 - At-risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation, or
- Is experiencing homelessness

All other families must have an income equal to or below 85% of the state median income AND a "need" for child care.

Income

Your income is usually wages, salaries, child or spousal support, disability or unemployment, payments, annuities, cash assistance (but not SSI), self-employment income, worker's compensation, and veteran's benefits.

Need for Child Care

You meet the "need" requirement if you are working, searching for work, searching for a home, going to school, taking a work training. You may also meet the need requirement if you are unable to care for your child because you have a physical or mental health condition.

Tip: Programs sometimes don't understand the rules so be persistent and ask for the child care bridge navigator at your Resource and Referral agency, or call the Child Care Law Center for help.

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HOW TO GET IT

Ask your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency about whether you qualify for CDE General Child Care or any other type of affordable child care.

WHO GETS PRIORITY

There is a waitlist for CDE General Child Care. If you are eligible, your local Alternative Payment Program that distributes CDE General Child Care will put your name on a waiting list if there is no space available. Families are called off the waiting list in order of priority.

The child care waiting list has two priorities:

First Priority

If you are a parent, resource parent, or caregiver whose child is

- Receiving child protective services,
- Not receiving child welfare services but is identified as abused, neglected, or exploited, or
- At-risk of abuse, neglect or exploited.

If you fit into one of these groups, you do not need to have a very low income, work, or have another reason to get help paying for child care. Your income or need for child care does not matter if you have first priority.

To get first priority, parents, parents, caregivers *must have* a written referral from:

- a legal, medical, or social services agency,
- a local educational agency liaison for homeless children and youths,
- a Head Start program, or
- an emergency or transitional shelter

Second Priority

If you don't have first priority and you are put on a child care waiting list, your place on the list is based on your income. When a child care subsidy becomes available, the family with the lowest income on the list gets child care first. When two families have the same income, a family with a child who has a disability will get child care first.

HOW LONG IT LASTS

You get CDE General Child Care without losing it or having to report any changes in your situation for 12 months or more.

The only exception is if you qualify based on your family's income and it goes above 85% of the state median income. If your family's income is above 85% of the state median income, then you must check with the agency where you get your child care subsidy to see if you still qualify.

Note: This income reporting requirement does not apply to you if you are getting child care because your child receives protective services, or is identified as abused, neglected, or exploited, or is at-risk of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

As long as you continue to qualify for CDE General Child Care, you will get it until the next time you certify your child care after your child turns 13 years old. If your child has a disability, you could get child care until your child is 21 years old.

3. Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children

It can be hard to quickly find good, affordable child care when a child is placed in your home unexpectedly. The Emergency Child Care Bridge navigators help qualifying families find child care and a temporary (up to 6 months with a 6 month extension) voucher to pay for it.

WHO QUALIFIES

The Child Care Bridge Program is for

- Resource families and families that have a child placed with them
- Licensed foster family homes or certified family homes
- Approved homes of relatives or non-relative extended family members
- Parenting youth in foster care and non-minor parents in foster care.

Parents own children who live with them do not qualify for the Bridge Program.

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Most counties have the Child Care Bridge Program, but some do not.

HOW TO GET IT

Ask your child's child welfare social worker about whether your county offers the Emergency Child Care Bridge Program and how to sign up for it. You can also ask your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency about the program. The Child Care Bridge Program navigators who will help you find child care.

HOW IT WORKS

The Child Care Bridge Program is in the form of a voucher that pays for child care. The agency paying for the Child Care Bridge Program voucher either pays the family or the person providing the child care.

WHO GETS PRIORITY

The Child Care Bridge Program has a waiting list. You might have to be placed on the waiting list if the program does not have enough vouchers for everyone who qualifies. Each county has its own rules for the way they prioritize families on the waiting list.

HOW LONG IT LASTS

You can receive the Child Care Bridge Program voucher for up to six months, and sometimes up to twelve months, until your child turns 13 years old. If your child has a disability, you may qualify for the Child Care Bridge Program until your child turns 21 years old.

Navigators help families find long-term child care after the Child Care Bridge Program voucher expires or when a child moves back with their family of origin.

4. State Preschool

WHO QUALIFIES

The California State Preschool Program is for any parent, resource parent, or caregiver whose child is 2.9 to five years old and

- Receiving child protective services, or

- Identified as abused, neglected, or exploited, or
- At-risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation

If a child in your care meets one of the above definitions, you do not need to meet income guidelines, work, or have another reason to get help paying for child care.

Income

You can also qualify based on your income.

- Part-day state preschool - Your family income is equal to or less than 85% of the state median income. You do not have to be working or going to school for your child to attend part-day state preschool. You will not have to pay a family fee.
- Full-day state preschool - Your family income must be equal to or less than 85% of the state median income. You must work, go to school, or have some other need.

Other Ways to Qualify

If you are experiencing homelessness, then you qualify for part-day and full-day state preschool, and do not need to meet the income or need requirements.

You can also qualify without taking into account your income if

- You receive public assistance such as CalWORKs or SSI, or
- Your child has a disability

HOW TO GET IT

Ask your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency about whether you qualify for state preschool or any other type of affordable child care. You can also check with your local school district office about your preschool options.

WHO GETS PRIORITY

If you are eligible for state preschool, the preschool might need to put your name on a waiting list if there are not enough spaces. Families are called off the waiting list in order of priority. The preschool waiting list has three priorities:

First Priority

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Families whose child receives protective services, or is abused, neglected or exploited or at risk of abuse,

neglect or exploitation. Your income should not be taken into account for your place on the waiting list. If the school is unable to enroll your child, it must refer you to the local R&R who can help you find another child development program.

Second Priority

Eligible four-year old children who are not in Transitional Kindergarten. As preschool spaces become available, families with the lowest income get preschool first.

Third Priority

Eligible three-year old children. As preschool spaces become available, families with the lowest income get preschool first.

When two families have the same income and have second or third priority on the waiting list, a family with a child who has a disability will get preschool first. If none of the families with the same income ranking has a child with a disability, the family that has been on the waiting list the longest is admitted first.

HOW LONG IT LASTS

Your child can stay in state preschool without you having to report any changes in your situation for 12 or more months. The only exception is if you qualify based on your family's income and it goes above 85% of the state median income. If your family's income is above 85% of the state median income, then you must check with your preschool to see if you still qualify. This income report requirement does not apply to you if you qualify for state preschool because you have a child who receives protective services, or is abused, neglected, or exploited, or at risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Your child can be between 2.9 years old and five years old to attend preschool. If your child is five years old, then they are no longer eligible for state preschool. However, your 5 year old child is eligible for either Transitional Kindergarten or Kindergarten.

5. Head Start and Early Head Start

WHO QUALIFIES

Resource families qualify for Head Start and Early Head Start. You can get Early Head Start if your child is 0-2 years-old or if you are pregnant. You can get Head Start if your child is 3-5 years-old. If you have a child in foster care or with a disability, your child qualifies for Early Head Start and Head Start, no matter your family's income.

Resource parents do not need to meet any income or need requirements to enroll the child in their care in Head Start.

HOW TO GET IT

Contact the nearest Head Start program in your area or contact your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency to find one. The Head Start program will help you directly to determine whether you are eligible for the program.

HOW LONG IT LASTS

If your child returns to their home of origin or is adopted while in Head Start, your child can remain in the program for the rest of that program year and the next program year.

When your child moves from Early Head Start (ages 0-3) to Head Start (ages 3-5), your family will be reevaluated for eligibility.

6. Other Affordable Child Care Programs

Other types of state and local affordable child care programs are available throughout California.

Visit your local Child Care Resource & Referral agency to find out which programs you qualify for. The Resource & Referral Agency will also help you choose the best child care for you.

To find the R&R in your community, call 1-800-543-7793 or go to www.rnetwork.org/find_child_care.

*This publication provides general information about the topic covered. It should not be considered legal advice. We believe the information is current as of November 2019, but the law changes often.
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