Child Care Subsidy Program
Parent Handbook

If you have questions about any of the information in this handbook, please follow up with your local Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agency.

***www.ChildCareNJ.com/Parents/CCRR* • 1-800-332-9227**

State of New Jersey
Phil Murphy, *Governor*
Sheila Oliver, *Lt. Governor*

Department of Human Services
Division of Family Development
Carole Johnson, *Commissioner*

04/18

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OVERVIEW

Welcome to New Jersey's Child Care Subsidy Program! Here's important information you need to know about how the program works.

New Jersey's Child Care Subsidy Program is here to:

- Assist you with paying for child care services;
- Give you with information about providers and programs so you can make informed decisions about child care;
- Connect you to other supportive services; and
- Help child care programs improve so they provide quality services and educational opportunities for your family.

The New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development (DHS/DFD) is responsible for overseeing New Jersey's Child Care Subsidy Program, which is administered by Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Agencies.

How do you access these services? By contacting your CCR&R. There is a CCR&R in every county and you can find the CCR&R in your county by phone or online:

- NJ Child Care Hotline 1-800-332-9227
- ChildCareNJ.gov/Parents/CCRR

CCR&R staff will tell you about how the program works, the program rules and how to use your child care subsidy. The staff also will help you find a child care provider who can accept your subsidy. Your CCR&R also offers information about finding quality child care options.

YOUR CHILD CARE SUBSIDY

Now that you have been approved for a child care subsidy, you are eligible for 12 months of child care assistance. From the date you were approved, you have 60 days to start to use your child care subsidy.

Child Care Agreements

Within 10 days of receiving approval for your subsidy, you must complete and sign the following agreements with your chosen child care provider(s):

- Parent/Applicant and Provider Agreement (PAPA)
- e-Child Care Agreement

Your Parent/Applicant and Provider Agreement (PAPA) will include:

- The start and end date of child care services;
- The state reimbursement rate; and
- Program rules, including your responsibilities and the provider's responsibilities.

The PAPA provides important information about program rules and your rights and responsibilities. It also tells you about the reasons your subsidy could be terminated or you could become ineligible for the program (for example: if you did not follow the program rules or if you make too much money.) It is very important that you complete and return the PAPA to your CCR&R right away.

Your e-Child Care Agreement will include:

- Agreement to use the attendance system daily – either through a swipe machine or phone call – depending on what type of system your provider uses. Check with your provider for additional information about the attendance system; and
- Parent/applicant and provider responsibilities, including program rules.

Before returning your agreements, please make sure all information has been filled out completely and correctly and the address on the agreement is the address where your child will receive care.

If you have more than one provider (for example: a before/after care provider and a separate summer camp provider), you will need to complete separate agreements for each provider.

Before payment for your child care can start, both you and your provider must sign the PAPA and the e-Child Care Agreement. Once the agreements have been signed, your CCR&R will inform you of your approved child care start date. Agreements cannot be backdated.

These agreements must be completed and signed within 10 calendar days. If you need additional time to sign the agreements, you can contact your CCR&R and request an extension. If you don't return the required paperwork and documents within the designated time period, you will lose your subsidy and need to start from the beginning of the application process.

Selecting a Child Care Provider

If you do not already have an eligible, quality child care provider, it is very important to begin right away to find one that meets your child care needs. Your CCR&R can give you a list of providers that are licensed, registered or approved by the state.
Here are some things to think about:

- Plan for the full year of child care. Your child care needs may be different in the summer than during the school year.
- Child care subsidies cannot pay for religious instruction.
- Look for a Grow NJ Kids participating program.

Quality Child Care

Grow NJ Kids, New Jersey's Quality Rating Improvement System, is an initiative to raise the quality of child care and early learning across the state. It provides you with information on selecting a quality provider so you can make the most of your child's early learning opportunities. To find a participating program near you visit: GrowNJKids.gov/ParentsFamilies/ProviderSearch

You can also visit GrowNJKids.gov/ParentsFamilies for a printable checklist to use when looking for a child care or early learning program.

You may contact your CCR&R by calling 1-800-332-9227 to get a list of child care providers or visit the DHS/DFD website at www.ChildCareNJ.gov.

Eligible Child Care Providers

You can use your subsidy at the following types of child care programs. Only these types of programs are eligible for payment:

Licensed Child Care Centers
Licensed Child Care Centers are facilities that have been licensed by New Jersey's Department of Children and Families, Office of Licensing, for the care, development and supervision of six or more children under 13 years of age who are in care for less than 24 hours a day.

School-Based Before and Aftercare Programs
School-Based Before and Aftercare Programs are school-age programs that provide before and after school child care services. Only school-age programs licensed through New Jersey's Department of Children and Families, Office of Licensing, are eligible for payment through the Child Care Subsidy Program.

Registered Family Child Care Providers
Registered Family Child Care Providers are providers who care for no more than five children at any one time in their home and have received an initial, renewal or temporary Certification of Registration demonstrated to the satisfaction of the sponsoring organizations (CCR&Rs) for the Department of Children and Families, Office of Licensing.

Approved Home Providers (In-Home and Family, Friends and Neighbors)
Approved Home Providers are individuals who have been evaluated and approved by the New Jersey Division of Family Development or its designee and care for no more than two unrelated children or no more than five siblings for fewer than 24 hours of care per day. The care may be provided in your home or in the home of a family member, friend or neighbor.

Summer Day Camps
Summer Day Camps provide services to children only during the summer months for a portion of the day and are licensed by New Jersey's Department of Health under the Youth Camp Safety Act of New Jersey. Overnight and residential facilities are not eligible for payment.

Early Head Start and Head Start Program
Early Head Start programs provide comprehensive early learning and childhood development services to low-income children from birth to age three. Head Start programs provide the same services for children ages three to five. Early Head Start and Head Start programs may be located in child care centers or family child care homes through agencies in local communities.

Paying for Child Care Services

Your provider will be paid directly by the Child Care Subsidy Program on your behalf. Pay varies based on the following:

- Income and family size
- Age of child in care
- Type of care selected
- Hours of care needed

As long as you comply with the Child Care Subsidy Program rules and federal funding is available, your child care provider will receive payment during your eligible period of service.

If your provider's costs are higher than the amount the state pays, you will have to pay the co-pay shown on your final agreement (see section on Co-Payment for more information) and the extra amount.

Payment will begin on the date listed on your signed Parent/Applicant and Provider Agreement (PAPA) and e-Child Care (ECC) agreement. If your child is already receiving care with a provider prior to your approval for a subsidy, you are responsible for payment of any services before approval with that provider.

Payment cannot be issued to a provider whose License, Certificate of Registration or Approval is revoked, suspended or expired, or if there is an immediate health or safety danger.

Co-Payment (Co-Pay)

Some families eligible to receive a child care subsidy are required to share the cost of child care, known as a co-payment or co-pay. This co-pay is separate from other fees. If the cost of your child care is higher than your subsidy, you will have to pay the extra amount as well as the co-pay shown on your final agreement.

- Co-pay is determined by family income, family size and the hours of care needed.
- The co-pay is the amount that is **not covered** by the state subsidy and may be in addition to other fees.
- Families who have a co-pay are required to pay the co-pay to their providers directly as agreed upon on your Parent/Applicant Provider Agreement (PAPA). Receipts of payments must be kept for your records.
- You can estimate your co-pay by visiting our calculator at www.ChildCareNJ.gov.
- Failure to pay the co-pay can result in termination of your child care subsidy.

REMEMBER: The co-pay is your responsibility and must be paid directly to the provider. If the provider charges more than the state rate, you will be required to pay the co-pay amount plus the difference of what the provider charges above the state rate.

RECORDING ATTENDANCE

Your Families First Child Care Card

Your child's attendance in the Child Care Subsidy Program will be recorded through the automated e-Child Care (ECC) system. You will access ECC by using your Families First card, which will arrive in the mail in a **plain, white unmarked envelope with a PO Box address from Austin, Texas. PLEASE DO NOT THROW IT AWAY.**

You must activate your card within three days of receiving it by calling 1-800-997-3333, also printed on the back of the card. At the time of activation, you will be required to select a four-digit PIN number.

You can select and approve up to two designees to receive their own card. Each designee will also need to call and activate their card and select a four-digit PIN before they can start using it.

You must contact your CCR&R **within three calendar days** to report a lost, stolen, misplaced or damaged card.

If you already have a Families First card for New Jersey Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (NJ SNAP) benefits or Work First New Jersey (WFNJ) welfare benefits, contact your CCR&R so that you can use your existing card for your child care subsidy benefits.

Checking In and Out

There are two ways to record attendance when checking your child in and out of child care, depending on your provider. You can swipe your Families First card at a Point of Service (POS) machine or you can call in daily using the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system.

For your provider to be paid, you must check your child in and out of care. Otherwise, you will be responsible for payment.

If your child will be absent due to illness, you must report your child's sick day by calling the number printed on the back of your card. You also should call your provider to report the absence.

You may also record your child's absence when the child returns to care as long as it is within the 13 day back-swipe/call-in period. Visit www.ChildCareNJ.gov/Parents/eChildCare or call your CCR&R for more information about checking your child in and out of care.

Things to Remember:

- *Only authorized users can check your child in and out of care and under no circumstances should your PIN or card be provided to the child care program staff or director. Misusing your card will result in termination of your child care subsidy.*
- *Replacing your card (or your designees card) three or more times during your eligibility period will result in a formal investigation and could lead to termination of your child care subsidy.*
- *If you do not record your child's attendance, you will be responsible to pay your provider for this period of time.*
- *If your child will be out sick for five consecutive days, you must give your provider a doctor's note.*
- *If your child is has three or more unexcused absences in a pay cycle (two-week period), the provider will not be paid for those unexcused absences.*
- *More than 10 unexcused sick days in a row can disqualify you from the program.*

MAKING CHANGES

Changing Child Care Providers

If you need to change your child care provider, you are required to contact your CCR&R within 10 calendar days **before the change**.

You also must let your current provider know 10 calendar days before you end care with them.

You will receive a new PAPA to sign with your new provider. Once the new PAPA has been approved, your CCR&R will let you know what date you can start care with the new provider.

Before you begin care with your new provider, you must honor all contract agreements with the previous provider, including proper notification requesting the end of child care and payment in full of everything you owe.

If you change child care providers without approval from your CCR&R, you need to pay for the full cost of the service until you receive the start date on your new final PAPA and e-Child Care agreements.

All providers must meet the state of New Jersey's health and safety standards and DHS/DFD program requirements.

If there is imminent danger at a child care provider site that jeopardizes the health, safety, or well-being of your child or any child, the 10 calendar day notice will not be required.

Changes in Family Circumstances

According to the Child Care Subsidy Program eligibility requirements, you need to be working, attending school or attending job training full time in order to receive your subsidy.

Sometimes things change, but you still need child care. If you find yourself in any of the situations listed below, you may still get help paying for child care or your co-pay may be reduced. This is called a "Temporary Change Period."

- Termination of employment, school or training;
- Seasonal work or school breaks;
- Reduced hours of employment, school or training ;
- Wage reduction or increase; or
- Medical leave, family leave or maternity leave.

Other family circumstances you should report to your CCR&R are changes in family size, such as marital status and the birth of a child.

You can only be approved for one "Temporary Change" per 12-month eligibility period.

Contact your CCR&R for more information regarding how to request a Temporary Change Period.

CONTINUING BENEFITS

Redetermination of Eligibility

Once every 12 months, you will be asked to complete an Application for Redetermination. You will need to provide updated information about your child care needs, income and employment.

If you do not provide the required information, you will no longer be eligible to receive a child care subsidy.

Upon receipt of your information, your CCR&R will review the application and notify your family by mail if your subsidy will continue.

Reasons for Termination

Your family and/or a specific child can be terminated from receiving a subsidy if:

- You are no longer a resident of New Jersey.
- You no longer meet program eligibility requirements.
- Your child no longer lives with you.
- You do not comply with child care program and policy requirements.
- Your income exceeds program income limits.
- You provide false information and/or documentation.
- You do not submit paperwork and documentation on time.
- You do not establish a repayment agreement if you received child care when ineligible.
- You do not pay your co-pay.
- You do not use your Families First card correctly.
- Your child is absent 10 or more unexcused days in a row.

OTHER THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

Your Rights

When you apply for the Child Care Subsidy Program and while you are receiving benefits, you are entitled to certain information and services.

- You have the right to choose a Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development (DHS/DFD) eligible child care center, family child care home, approved home (in-home and family, friend or neighbor), school-based program or summer camp.
- You have the right to visit your child any time she or he is in the provider's care.
- If at any time you are dissatisfied with your current provider, you have the right to choose a new provider.
- If it becomes necessary to terminate your subsidy, your CCR&R will provide notice 10 days before the effective date of the termination of your child care subsidy. This termination notice will be submitted to you and all child care providers providing services to your family.
- You have the right to appeal or receive an administrative review regarding any decision that results in the denial or termination of your child care subsidy, as long as that the decision in not due to the availability of funding.
- You have the right to make a complaint, discuss areas of concern or suggestions regarding the DHS/DFD Child Care Subsidy Program by calling the hotline number 1-800-332-9227.

Your Responsibilities

It is your responsibility to follow **all** rules and regulations of the New Jersey Child Care Subsidy Program. You must remember to:

- Complete and return all applications and agreements to your CCR&R in a timely manner;
- Provide accurate information and documentation;
- Activate your Families First card within three days of receiving it in the mail;
- Pay your co-pay and any additional rates on time and maintain a record or receipts;
- Comply with all ECC program rules and policies;
- Record attendance (through card swipe or call-in system) daily;
- Ensure that only authorized persons use your Families First card;
- Report absences and sick days timely and accurately; and
- Provide a doctor's note and inform your provider if your child is sick and unable to attend child care for five days in a row.

Things You MUST Report

Immediately report any of the following to your CCR&R:

- Your Families First card has been lost, stolen or misplaced (report within three days.)
- Your child no longer lives with you (report within three days.)
- You moved or no longer need child care assistance (report within 10 days.)
- You want to change providers (report to CCR&R and current provider 10 days prior to change.)
- You miss swiping or calling in your child's attendance on any given day (back-swipe or call within 13 days to record your child's attendance.)

- Your child will be out sick for five days in a row. (Note: Remember to give a doctor's note to your child care provider.)
- Your family's circumstance changes resulting in a need to have your co-pay reassessed (complete the "Notification of Change" within 10 days of the change.)
- Your family's income exceeds program income limits for your family size. You can find current income limits at ChildCareNJ.gov/Parents/SubsidyProgram.
- Your family assets change (real estate, businesses, bank accounts) that exceed $1 million (report within three days.)

If you do not follow the program rules or do not provide truthful and accurate information to the best of your knowledge, you will lose your child care subsidy and will have to repay any child care assistance you already received.

If You Disagree with a CCR&R Action

If your child care services are negatively affected by an action of your CCR&R, and you disagree, you may request a case review and/or an administrative review. These actions may include, but are not limited to, denial or reduction of child care assistance, termination of child care assistance or repayment of child care assistance.

If you wish to request a case review before the CCR&R Review Committee, please contact your CCR&R within 10 calendar days of receiving a notice or letter about the action.

If you are not satisfied with the decision of the CCR&R Review Committee, you will be provided with an opportunity to request a case review before the Division of Family Development's Bureau of Administrative Review and Appeals (BARA). A timely request must be made within 10 calendar days of your action to:

Bureau of Administrative Review & Appeals
Division of Family Development
P.O. Box 716
Trenton, NJ 08625-0716

Should you request a review, please make sure you provide BARA with copies of all documentation concerning the action.

If child care assistance to your family is terminated or you are disqualified from receiving subsidy from the New Jersey Child Care Subsidy Program, payments to your child care providers will end on the effective date of the disqualification and/or termination and will not continue during the appeal and review process.

If the outcome of the case/administrative review is in your favor, services will be restarted or resumed as long as funding is still available.

Concerns About Your Child's Care

You have the right to make a complaint against any provider at any time. Contact your CCR&R to find out how you can make a complaint.

If you have reasonable cause to believe that a child has been, or is being, subjected to any form of hitting, excessive physical punishment, profane, indecent or obscene language, sexual abuse, physical restraint, exploitation by an adult or any other kind of child abuse or neglect (including lack of medical care, not enough food or clothing, an unclean environment, lack of adult supervision and lack of school attendance), you are required by state law to report such allegations to:

Division of Child Protection and Permanency
Office of Child Abuse Control
1-877-NJ-Abuse (1-877-652-2873)

Discrimination

This program prohibits discrimination in determining eligibility for child care assistance. If you believe you have been discriminated against by the New Jersey Child Care Subsidy Program because of race, color, disability, religion, national origin or another reason, you can contact:

Office of the Director
Division of Family Development, N.J.
Department of Human Services
P.O. Box 716
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

Additional Support

The NJ DHS/DFD works in partnership with service providers and other state and municipal agencies to help families access quality programs and services. These include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Head Start, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Medicaid and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

You can find many of these programs on the DHS website at www.NJ.gov/HumanServices or you can visit www.ChildCareNJ.gov/Resources for links to more support services and resources.