

Child Care and Education

Every child in California has the right to a free public education, whether they are citizens, legal residents, have no documents, or are homeless. There is government money available to pay for childcare when kids are not at school, for families who are in CalWORKs or working.

EDUCATION

Children between the ages of 6 and 18 are required by California law to attend school.

The L.A. County Office of Education offers numerous programs for all family members, including:

- Literacy programs to help students and parents learn to read, and to train parents to help their children learn
- Computer training and job readiness for parents
- Early Advantage programs for children under age 3
- Head Start and State Preschool programs for children

Call your local school district or call (562) 922-6111 County-wide to find out about preschool programs and family literacy programs.

► 1. After School Enrichment

Especially if you are in CalWORKs, call your local elementary school to see if it has an after-school enrichment program. This program provides supervised after-school fun, growth, snacks, and learning for children from first through sixth grade. Children must be attending the school where the program is offered.

If your children attend school in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), call (866) 4YS-CARE for information on enrollment in afterschool programs. If your children attend school in a different school district, call the local district.

► 2. Homeless Children's Rights

Homeless children:

- Do not need a permanent address to enroll in school
- May remain at the same school they attended before becoming homeless, or enroll at the school serving the place they are living temporarily
- Cannot be denied enrollment just because any documents are not

immediately available

- Have the right to participate in school meals, special education, Title I and any other federal, state or local programs for which they are eligible
- Must be provided transportation if other children get transportation
- Cannot be isolated or separated from the main school environment just because they are homeless.

These special rights under federal McKinney-Vento law apply to all children and teens without a fixed, regular adequate residence **including** if you are staying with friends or relatives because you lost your housing, you are waiting for foster placement, or you are living in any kind of shelter, car, motel, campground, abandoned building, garage, or similar place.

CHILD CARE

CalWORKs will pay for child care for children who are 10 years old or younger, up to age 12 if the county has funds available, and up to age 21 if the child is disabled and needs special care. You may be eligible for child care even if you are under a CalWORKs sanction, and after you leave CalWORKs for up to two years, and also if you are low income, working, but do not ever get CalWORKs cash aid.

If you or someone you know would like to **provide** child care, call (323)-981-3350 or a Child Care Agency for licensing, training and other information.

► 1. How Do I Get Child Care?

To get money for child care, you will have to talk to a child care "agency." These agencies are called Resource and Referral (R&R) or Alternative Payment Programs (APP). They will

- Help any family find child care;

- Provide information to parents on how to choose good child care;
 - Make child care payments
- You can get information about how to apply for child care over the phone (877-244-5399) or in person. You can file your application for child care at the DPSS, or at the agency. Your child care will be approved in 2 steps:

First, the agency will see if your family is eligible for child care within 4 days of your filing your child care application. **Second**, you must find a child care provider. The provider will be approved within 2 days of your giving the agency all the necessary information about the provider.

Call the child care hotline (877) 244-5399 or Legal Aid for help if it takes a long time to get your child care approved. You will get written notice telling you whether you and your provider have been approved or denied. If you disagree with the decision you can ask for a fair hearing.

► 2. How Payment is Made

A Provider Payment Request will be mailed each month to you and to your child care provider. Both you and the child care provider must sign the request and mail it to the child care agency at the address on the form. Payments are then made directly to your child care provider. If the payment is missing or incorrect contact the agency.

► 3. Choosing Quality Child Care

It is your right as a parent to choose the child care you think is best for your child. The agency will give you referrals and information on what to look for when choosing a provider. If you decide the referrals are not good choices, ask for more referrals. Choose the child care that's best for you:

- Child care centers, preschools, or family child care are licensed.
- License-exempt child care can be provided by friends, relatives, or neighbors. If you use license-exempt care, you will need to file a statement that your provider meets minimal health and safety requirements. The child care agency will not pay for child care provided to you by someone on your CalWORKs case.
- If the provider is caring for children from more than one family (besides

their own) they may need a license. Most providers will have to be fingerprinted and go through a criminal background check. Your relatives may not have to go through this process.

If your income is over these limits, you may still qualify for low cost child care. Call the R&R or APP agencies.

▶ 4. Hearings

You have a right to a fair hearing if you disagree with decisions made by DPSS or the child care agency. You can ask for a hearing by using the back of any child care "Notice of Action" forms. You should file within 14 days or before the action/termination happens.

▶ 4. CalWORKs Child Care

There are three "stages" of child care. You should not have any problems as you move from one "stage" to another. You will generally receive child care while you are participating in an approved welfare to work activity (work, school, training, appointments with GAIN, or any welfare to work activity).

Stage One

The child care agency will pay for any qualified child care that you choose for up to six months or until your welfare to work activity and child care are both stable. Teen parents will also get Stage One child care, as long as they are in Cal-Learn. You may be eligible to receive child care payments for up to 30 days prior to the date of your child care application: call Legal Aid for more information.

Stage Two

After both your welfare to work activity and child care are stable, the child care agency will move you to Stage Two. You will stay in Stage Two while you are receiving CalWORKs and are in an approved welfare to work activity. You can keep getting Stage Two child care paid for 24 months after you are earning too much money to be eligible for CalWORKs.

Stage Three

"Stage Three" is subject to budget cuts in Sacramento and there are waiting lists. It is available for low income working parents who do not receive CalWORKs. You qualify for Stage Three child care if your income is below the levels in the following chart:

Family Size	Monthly Income Limit
1 or 2	\$2,336
3	\$2,503
4	\$2,781
5	\$3,226
6	\$3,671
7	\$3,754
8	\$3,838
9	\$3,921
10	\$4,005

(Chart for May 2005)

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS?

▶ 1. Lack of Child Care

You can be temporarily excused from participating in work requirements of CalWORKs if child care is not reasonably available. The case manager will evaluate each case individually and periodically. Child care is not reasonably available if:

- You are not satisfied with the child care
- There is no child care close enough
- You have no transportation to the child care
- There are no providers operating during the hours you need child care
- The provider's license is under investigation
- The provider cannot commit to providing care for your child
- The child care is not appropriate for your child's needs.

▶ 2. Complaints about Providers

You should complain about your child care if there bad conditions, or you suspect abuse or mistreatment. You can complain at the following places:

- The DPSS child care coordinator
- The R&R or APP Agency
- Child Care Hotline (877) 244-5399, Monday through Friday, 8 am to 5 pm
- Community Care Licensing (310) 665-1940
- Legal Aid

▶ 3. Brokers

If you are applying for Child Care, you do not need to pay anyone to help you with the application (these people are often called "brokers"). The child care agency must provide you with a worker who speaks your language to help you complete your application. You can also get help from community organizations who will not charge to help you apply.

If you use a broker, be very careful about signing a "representative payee" form, which gives the broker direct control of your child care payments. If you have any problems with brokers, complain.

WHERE CAN I GO TO FIND CHILD CARE?

These agencies help in finding child care providers and provide childcare payments.

- **San Fernando Valley & Antelope Valley:** Child Care Resource Center (818) 756-3360 or (661) 949-0615
- **Pasadena, Monrovia, La Cañada:** Child Care Information Service (626) 449-8221
- **Pomona Area:** Pomona Unified School District Development Program (800) 822-5777 or (909) 397-4740
- **Hollywood, Downtown, Silver Lake:** Child & Family Services (213) 427-2700
- **Santa Monica, Beach Cities, Culver City :** Connections for Children (310) 452-3325
- **East L.A., Monterey Park, Bell, Santa Fe Springs, Montebello:** Mexican-American Opportunity Found. (323) 890-9600
- **Boyle Heights:** International Institute (323) 224-3800
- **South Los Angeles, Inglewood, Hawthorne, Gardena, Watts:** Crystal Stairs, Inc. (323) 299-8998
- **South San Gabriel Valley (Baldwin Park, El Monte, Whittier):** Options (626) 856-5900
- **Compton, Carson, Downey, Harbor City, Lomita, Lynwood, Paramount, South Gate, Torrance:** Center for Community and Family Services (888) 421-4247 toll free.
- **Gardena:** Drew CalWORKs (310) 609-3885 (payments, not referrals)
- **Long Beach, San Pedro, Bellflower, Cerritos, Norwalk:** Children's Home Society of CA (562) 256-7400

A Child Care Information & Resources Directory for L.A. County listing hundreds of licensed providers is available at <http://childcare.co.la.ca.us>.