

Can I Get Help Paying for Child Care?

THERE ARE THREE MAIN WAYS FAMILIES CAN GET HELP PAYING FOR CHILD CARE

Subsidized child care programs

Your child may enroll in a program that gets subsidies directly from the state. It could be a child care center, state preschool, or family child care network. These programs are operated by school districts or non-profit agencies.

Vouchers (Child Care Payment Programs)

You may find the child care you want and sign up with an “alternative payment program,” which will pay the provider directly. You may choose care at a center, licensed family child care, or in some cases, a license exempt caregiver.

Head Start

Your child may enroll in Early Head Start (0-3 yr olds) or Head Start (3-5 yr olds). These programs are federally funded and follow federal income eligibility rules. If your child has special needs, you may receive priority, regardless of your income.

IS MY CHILD ELIGIBLE FOR A STATE CHILD CARE SUBSIDY?

Eligibility is based on your family income, the number and ages of your children, where you live, and your family’s needs. You are eligible if:

- Your child has special needs **or**
- You are working, in school or training, looking for work, disabled, seeking permanent housing, or receiving Child Protective Services **and**
- Your income is below the “ceiling” for your family size. As of July 2022, that’s:

Family Size	Income per month (before taxes)
1-2	\$6,008
3	\$6,842
4	\$7,941
5	\$9,211
6	\$10,482
7	\$10,720
8	\$10,958
9	\$11,196
10	\$11,435

Note: Head Start has different eligibility rules.



SUBSIDIZED CHILD CARE IS NOT NECESSARILY FREE!

If your income is very low, the state pays the whole child care bill. If it’s higher but still under the ceiling, the state pays part and you pay part.

Where does the money come from? Subsidies for all programs, except Head Start, are a combination of state and federal funds. The federal government pays for Head Start. All these programs exist because parents and other champions of children and families organized and advocated for them.

If you are in CalWORKs

You are entitled to receive child care, but only if you need it to work, attend school, training, or job club, or look for a job. CalWORKs child care has three stages:

Stage 1. When you're new to the CalWORKs program.

Stage 2. When you are working and either still receiving cash aid or you stopped receiving aid within the previous 24 months.

Stage 3: You can continue to receive child care for children up to age 13 as long as you remain income-eligible.

The first step: When you enroll in CalWORKs, in order to get child care, ask your CalWORKs worker to send a "child care referral request form" to CDRC.

The second step: Work with a CDRC referral specialist to make the best child care choice for you and your family.

Finally: You and your child care provider will work with the payment program on the details of the payment process.

If you are not in CalWORKs

The bad news is: You don't automatically get a child care subsidy even if your income qualifies! (See the chart on the front.) That's because the state provides only enough funding for about one-third of eligible families. But you can:

- Call the CDRC Resource and Referral Line at 831-466-5820 to speak with a specialist about programs that fit your family's needs and to get help finding child care now.
- CDRC has the list of all the funded programs in Santa Cruz County and can help you connect with the enrollment and eligibility coordinators so you can secure your place on the waiting lists.



FINDING SUBSIDIZED CHILD CARE IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

There are various programs in Santa Cruz County that provide subsidized child care, however you may have to wait a while for an opening. Families are served according to state and federal funding priorities, not on a first-come, first-served basis. Here are the steps to help you find subsidized care:

1. Contact CDRC to find out about all the subsidized child care programs that may be able to serve your family. Call 831-466-5820 to speak with a Referral Specialist and receive your list of potential programs.
2. Call each program and ask if they have a subsidized child care opening. If there are no current openings, ask to be added to their waiting list.
3. Stay in touch with those programs and let them know if your contact information changes—you don't want to miss out on any offers of child care!
4. Inform the programs when your income or family size changes. For example, if your income goes down, you move up the priority list.
5. Be sure to respond to any communications from the child care programs you signed up for, so they know you're still interested. Once they have an opening, the program will help you with the enrollment process.