

# Child Care Law Center Quick Guide to Affordable Child Care Programs for Low-Income Families in California

## Do I qualify for affordable child care programs?

If you:

- Earn less than 70% of the state median income (\$4,340/month for a family of three), OR
- Received CalWORKs cash aid in the last 24 months, OR
- Are homeless, OR
- Are a foster parent, guardian or relative caregiver\*, OR
- Have a child with a disability,

Then you *probably* qualify for some type of subsidized child care, especially if you are working or going to school.

\*Foster parents, guardians, or relative caregivers must have a 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.

## What are the affordable child care & preschool programs?

1. CalWORKs vouchers
2. Alternative Payment (AP) vouchers
3. Foster Care Emergency Bridge Vouchers
4. Child Care Center spaces
5. California State Preschool
6. Head Start or Early Head Start spaces

 Call your local child care Resource & Referral (R&R) to find out which program you qualify for, how to choose the best child care for you, and how to sign up.

To find the R&R in your community, call 1-800-543-7793 or go to [www.rrnetwork.org/find\\_child\\_care](http://www.rrnetwork.org/find_child_care).

### 1. What are CalWORKs Vouchers?

CalWORKs child care vouchers are for parents who receive or received CalWORKs cash aid. See below for more information on the CalWORKs child care stages.

A voucher allows you to choose any child care provider who agrees to care for your child. You can choose licensed child care in a home or center, or Family, Friend or Neighbor care.

You must need child care because you are working, looking for work, getting training or an education, or because you are homeless or incapacitated.

## I receive CalWORKs cash aid. Who do I call to get child care?

You must ask your CalWORKs worker for child care. You should get child care when your child care application is approved. You should not be placed on a child care waiting list.

The rules are stricter if you *currently* get CalWORKs cash aid and are required to participate in specific Welfare-to-Work activities. Ask your worker for the full list of activities that you can do to get CalWORKs child care.

**PROTIP:** Ask your worker for child care immediately, because you can only get reimbursed for up to 30 days of child care payments before your child care *is approved*.

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

## What are the CalWORKs child care stages?

CalWORKs child care is called Stage 1, Stage 2, or Stage 3. Your child care should continue seamlessly through these stages as your children grow, whether 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.

**Stage 1** -- Starts as soon as you begin CalWORKs cash aid and your application is approved.

- If you need it, you must get child care when you attend your CalWORKs orientation, assessment, and engage in your welfare-to-work activity.

**PARENTS:** If you receive CalWORKs or cash aid and are turned down for child care, contact us by filling out our online intake form: [www.childcarelaw.org/help](http://www.childcarelaw.org/help)

**ATTORNEYS:** If your client is a foster parent, a survivor of domestic violence, homeless, or getting CalWORKs cash aid, and is turned down for child care, please call 415-558-8005

**Stage 2** -- When you no longer receive cash aid but still earn less than 85% of state median income.

- You can apply for Stage 2 child care even if you didn't enroll in Stage 1, or if something happened and you dropped from Stage 1.
- Whatever the reason, you must start your Stage 2 child care within 24 months of when you last got cash aid.

**Stage 3** – The child care agency will automatically transfer you from Stage 2 to Stage 3.

- You cannot get Stage 3 child care without first having Stage 1 or Stage 2 child care.
- If you leave Stage 3 child care, you cannot re-enroll, unless you receive cash aid again.

## 2. What are AP Vouchers?

AP vouchers are for any family who earns less than 70% of the state median income and has a “need” for child care. You remain eligible until your income is greater than 85% of the SMI.

A need is usually working or going to school, but being homeless or caring for a child who is receiving child protective services or at-risk, and other situations can also be considered a need.

Income is usually: wages, salaries, child or spousal support, disability or unemployment, pensions, annuities, cash aid, self-employment income, worker’s compensation, and veteran’s benefits.

A voucher allows you to choose any child care provider you want. You can choose licensed child care or Family, Friend or Neighbor care.

### If there’s a waiting list for AP vouchers or child care centers, which families are called first?

**First Priority** – Families whose children are receiving child protective services, or are identified as or at risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation.

**Second Priority** – Families with the lowest income. When two families have the same income, a family with a child who has a disability will be prioritized.

If you are homeless, or survivor of domestic violence, talk to a legal aid lawyer or a social worker about how to get first priority

**PROTIP:** Apply as soon as you can. There is often a waiting list to get this type of child care.

## 3. Can Foster Parents, Guardians, or Relative Caregivers receive child care?

If you are receiving CalWORKs cash aid and/or child care, then you are entitled to child care for a foster child or other child living in your home who you are responsible for supporting. You also are first priority for an AP voucher or center placement if a child in your care:

- Receives child protective services, OR

- Has been identified as being abused, neglected, or exploited, OR
- Is at risk-of being abused, neglected, or exploited.

You do not have to meet income guidelines, be working, or have another reason for child care to get help paying for child care for a child who meets one of the above definitions. You may also qualify for a 6- to 12-month Emergency Child Care Bridge voucher. Contact your R&R for more information.

**PROTIP:** Agencies and programs often misinterpret the rules so be persistent and ask for the foster care navigator at your Resource and Referral, or call the Child Care Law Center for help.

## 4. Can my child attend a child care center?

Many child care centers have state-funded spaces for low income families, with the same rules and requirements as those for AP vouchers. That means you must make less than 70% (85% starting July 1, 2019) of the state median income (SMI), and you are no longer eligible when you make 85% of the SMI.

Ask the R&R for a list of centers with subsidies in your area, or, if you see one you like, you can ask them directly if they have subsidized spaces.

## 5. What is State Preschool?

You do not have to be working or going to school for your child to attend **state preschool**, but you do have to prove that you earn less than 70% (85% starting July 1, 2019) of the state median income. State preschool is for children three years old or older, depending on availability.

## 6. What is Head Start?

Head Start and Early Head Start use federal income guidelines – for example, a family of 3 earning less than \$20,780 is eligible. There are higher income limits if your child has a disability. Children in foster care, or in families that are homeless, or receiving TANF or SSI can attend Head Start *regardless* of income. Head Start is for children three years old or older.

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