



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

**HUMAN  
SERVICES  
DEPARTMENT**

COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

**CalWORKs**

# **Stage One Child Care Program**

## **Parent / Provider Handbook**

A Handbook for Parents and Child Care Providers

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# CalWORKs Stage One Child Care Handbook

## Introduction

This handbook is for families approved for California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) Child Care. It also contains useful information for child care providers serving CalWORKs families. The CalWORKs Child Care program helps eligible families cover the costs associated with monthly child care as they move through their CalWORKs Employment Services (CWES) activities toward employment and self-sufficiency. The program ensures that access to adequate, safe, and stable child care does not prevent parents from fully engaging in CWES activities.

The child care system is divided into three stages. Each stage is funded differently and is available to families from different sources.

Stage One begins immediately with the family's CalWORKs cash aid approval. Stage One child care is available to CWES participants receiving aid and continues as long as they remain eligible.

Parents and guardians, you can choose the type of child care you believe is best for your children. There are many options including: a relative, friend, family child care provider, some recreational programs, and licensed child care centers.

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and the California Department of Education (CDE) establish and periodically update the rules for the CalWORKs Child Care Program. The guidance in this handbook aligns with CDSS and CDE guidance as of July 2025.

## General Information for Parents

To quickly set up and approve your child care, we need information about you, your child, and your provider. Your assigned Employment and Training Specialist (ETS) will help you navigate this process. If you have an urgent need to set up child care before an ETS has been assigned, you may leave a

message for the CalWORKs Employment Services Desk Worker at 831-454-4274. Be sure to include your name, your CalWORKs case number if you know it, and the phone number where we may reach you. An ETS will get back to you as soon as possible.

Notify your ETS of any changes to your child care to ensure that your provider is paid correctly and on time.

## Eligibility

CalWORKs recipients have access to a 24-month Stage One Child Care Authorization for full-time child care. Authorizations may be extended for families still receiving CalWORKs at the end of the 24-month authorization if all other requirements are met.

Child care is available for CalWORKs children through age 12, unless the child has exceptional needs and has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), in which case, they may remain eligible beyond age 12. School-age children are eligible for before and after school care.

Note: If a child is 12 years old at the end of a 24-month child care authorization and remains otherwise eligible for child care, the next authorization period will be 12 months, not 24 months.

You are **NOT** eligible for child care if:

- Only the children in the home are receiving CalWORKs
- At application, newly approved CalWORKs recipients are determined to have an Employment Services exemption and do not indicate that they would like to volunteer to participate in any Employment Services activities
- There are two parents in the home and one parent is available to care for the child while the other parent participates in employment or training activities

When your ETS has determined your eligibility, a packet including the required forms needed to set up care will be sent to your chosen child care provider. Once established, a Child Care Specialist will send you an approval notice and a Child Care Certificate (CSF 137) that needs to be signed by both you and the provider. You may scan and send electronically submit (email to [hsdcwes.childcare@santacruzcountyca.gov](mailto:hsdcwes.childcare@santacruzcountyca.gov)), or return completed paperwork in the envelope provided, or drop it off at 1020 Emeline Avenue in Santa Cruz or 500 Westridge Drive in Watsonville.

Several factors affect how much the County will pay your child care provider. Some of those factors include:

- Your child's age
- Your provider's rates
- The type of provider you have chosen (licensed vs unlicensed)
- How many hours have been selected (full or part-time)
  - Part-time care is fewer than 25 hours per week
  - Full-time care is 25 or more hours per week.
- Payment limits set by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) (also known as Regional Market Rate (RMR) and may be found [online](#))

**If you chose a provider whose rate exceeds the RMR maximum, you are responsible for paying the difference.**

If your employment or training occurs outside of a child care provider's normal operating hours, let your Employment & Training Specialist know, there may be child care available in the evenings and on weekends that can be paid through Stage One Child Care.

Transportation to and from your child care provider is not paid for outside of the \$65 per month transportation supportive service already given to eligible CWES participants. Some childcare providers offer transportation to and from school or to other childcare providers as part of their child care rate. In this

situation, the transportation would be covered as long as the cost does not exceed the RMR maximum.

In addition, a Child Care Specialist will work with you and your provider to answer any questions you may have regarding payments and rates.

## Choosing a Provider

You decide who provides child care for your child(ren). You are encouraged to visit one or more providers and ask for references from other parents. It is important to choose a provider that you feel comfortable with and who will provide quality care and meet the individual needs of your family.

The following people are **not eligible** to be paid as a child care provider:

- The child's parent
- Another adult on your CalWORKs case that is receiving cash aid
- Individuals under age 18
- Anyone who has not passed the TrustLine background check
- Anyone who does not have the right to work in the United States

All child care programs must provide adult supervision of the children and maintain sign in-and sign-out records.

If you need information about how to choose a child care provider or other child care information, you may contact:

### Santa Cruz County Office of Education Child Development Resource Center

Website: [childcare.santacruzcoe.org](http://childcare.santacruzcoe.org)

Phone: 831-466-5820

Email: [cdrc@santacruzcoe.org](mailto:cdrc@santacruzcoe.org)

### La Manzana Community Resources

Website: [communitybridges.org/lmcr/](http://communitybridges.org/lmcr/)

Phone: 831-724-2997 ext. 210

## CDSS – Child Care Licensing Resources for Parents

Website: <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/child-care-licensing/resources-for-parents>

### Types of Providers

Guidelines for related, unlicensed providers (grandparent or aunt/uncle ONLY)

If you would like a friend or relative to provide the care for your child(ren), the County may be able to pay them to provide child care if they meet certain requirements. This type of child care provider is called a license-exempt provider. Under State law, a person may provide child care without a license if they meet the following requirements:

- The provider is over age 18; **and**
  - Are only providing care for your child(ren) in addition to their own child(ren) of relatives; **or**
  - A relative of your child(ren) as defined by the State of California TrustLine Registry (Grandparent, Aunt/Uncle to child by blood relation or marriage only, no exceptions)

Most license-exempt providers must register with TrustLine and clear a background check.

### Trustline

#### All other Unlicensed Providers

Providers who are not a grandparent or aunt/uncle of your children must complete a TrustLine background check to be eligible to receive child care payments through the Stage One Child Care Program. Your child's cousins, great grandparents, and older siblings all must be TrustLine approved. Child care payments may be authorized for up to 120 days retroactive from the date the provider cleared the TrustLine background check and began providing child care.

The license exempt provider must:

- Be legally eligible to work in the United States
- Submit a TrustLine application
- Provide right-to-work documents as listed on the I-9 form (i.e., government issued ID & Social Security card) to the County.

A denial notice will be issued if the provider does not pass the TrustLine screening.

More information on the background check can be found at [www.trustline.org](http://www.trustline.org).

## Transfers – Stage Two

After your CalWORKs eligibility has ended, child care may be transferred to Stage Two Child Care. Stage Two Child Care is for families engaged in stable CalWORKs Employment Services activities, or who have transitioned off CalWORKs cash aid. Stage Two Child Care is administered on the Central Coast and in Santa Cruz County through the non-profit organization, Go Kids.

More information about Go Kids may be found at [GoKids.org](http://GoKids.org)

## Child Care After CalWORKs – Stage Three

After your CalWORKs case has closed and 24 months of Stage Two child care have been exhausted, you and your family may typically continue to get child care subsidies for as long as their children meet the age requirement and the family's income does not go over the limit.



## Three Stages of Child Care

Stage	Description	Agency Responsible
One	<p>Stage One immediately begins with the family's CalWORKs cash aid approval. Stage One child care is available to CWES participants who are on aid and participating in an approved activity.</p> <p>Families who are off cash aid and who are approved and waiting for a Stage Two slot may receive Stage One child care.</p> <p><b>Note: Participants waiting for a Stage Two slot must be transferred to Go Kids, Inc. as soon as a slot becomes available.</b></p>	Santa Cruz County Human Services Department
Two	<p>Stage Two may begin when child care is available through Go Kids, and the County determines stability for the client, or when a recipient is transitioning off aid.</p> <p>Participants who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are working and received cash aid at any time during the previous 24 months, or</li> <li>• Received a CalWORKs Diversion Payment in the previous 24 months, or</li> <li>• Are in an educational or vocational training activity AND are timing-out (CalWORKs 60-month lifetime limit), or</li> <li>• Are on-aid AND employed full/part-time may be eligible for Stage Two child care.</li> </ul> <p><b>Note: Income cannot exceed the State Median Income limit and services cannot be provided for more than two years following the month cash aid was discontinued.</b></p> <p>Participants can receive Stage Two child care for up to 24 consecutive months from the date cash aid is discontinued.</p>	Go Kids, Inc.
Three	<p>Stage Three provides child care for families no longer served by Stage One or Stage Two.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transitioning off cash aid.</li> <li>• Diversion</li> </ul>	Go Kids, Inc.

## General Information for Providers

The CalWORKS Child Care Program is committed to supporting families in their efforts to improve their financial wellbeing. The provider is hired by the parent and the family is the provider's customer. The County of Santa Cruz pays a subsidy to the provider directly, based on amounts determined by the State of California. Questions about rates and/or payments should be directed to the County Child Care Specialist.

Important things to remember:

- Any amounts exceeding the RMR are to be paid by the parent
- The County cannot pay for time that a child is in school or in another subsidized program
- The County will not pay more than the provider would charge a parent that is paying privately for the same level of care

## Payment Policies

- Child care reimbursements are made directly to the child care provider. To be reimbursed for child care charges, the provider must submit a completed and signed Child Care Reimbursement Report (CCP 2145). The forms may be dropped off at either Customer Service Center or be mailed to:

**County of Santa Cruz – Human Services**

**Attention: Fiscal Unit**

**P.O. Box 1320**

**Santa Cruz, CA 95061**

- The CCP 2145 is due by the 5<sup>th</sup> calendar day of the month following the month of service and payment will be issued within 21 days of receipt of the CCP 2145.
- If the County is unable to make payment within 21 calendar days due to extenuating circumstances, the impacted provider will be notified within a reasonable timeframe of when the County becomes aware of the circumstance causing the delay of reimbursement payment.

Extenuating circumstances may include an emergency or payment system malfunction.

- If a provider submits a CCP 2145 for multiple children, and not all individual records or invoices within the submission include adequate information to provide a payment, payments will not be withheld for those records or invoices that do include adequate information to provide a payment.
- If any payments are determined to be overpayments, those funds will be recouped.

## Parent Signature Requirements

The CCP 2145 can be processed without a parent's signature when all of the following conditions apply:

- The parent has not communicated with the provider for a minimum of seven consecutive days.
- The provider has notified the County Child Care Specialist (call: 831-763-8561 or email: [hsdcwes.childcare@santacruzcountycal.gov](mailto:hsdcwes.childcare@santacruzcountycal.gov)) of the parent's lack of communication.
- The County has documented the provider's unsuccessful attempts to collect a signature.

## Part-Time and Full-Time Care

For reimbursement purposes, part-time and full-time care are defined as follows:

- "Part-time care" is defined as care certified for a child for fewer than 25 hours per week.
- "Full-time care" is defined as care certified for a child for 25 or more hours per week.

## Absences

Providers may be paid even if the child has been absent, if:

- It is stated in their contract (licensed providers only) and a current copy is on file

- The policy does not differ from privately paying parties
- The reason for the absence is not required
- Holidays/Vacations as stated (up to ten days per year)

## Termination

Licensed Providers Only:

In cases of early termination, the County will pay for no more than ten additional calendar days or to the end of the current agreement, whichever comes first. There must be a written cancellation policy on file with the County to receive the additional ten days.

## County Child Care Contacts

Please contact your Employment & Training Specialist or the Child Care Specialist if you have child care questions or to report child care changes.

**ETS Desk Worker:** 831-454-4274 (voicemail only)

**Child Care Specialist:** 831-763-8561

### **Santa Cruz County Human Services Department Walk-In Sites:**

1020 Emeline Avenue Santa Cruz, CA 95060

500 Westridge Drive Watsonville, CA 95076

Please contact Child Care Fiscal if you have child care payment questions.

**Child Care Fiscal:** 831-454-4195

**Email:** [hsdcwes.childcare@santacruzcountyca.gov](mailto:hsdcwes.childcare@santacruzcountyca.gov)

### **Mailing Address for Reimbursement/Payments:**

County of Santa Cruz – Human Services

Attention: Fiscal Unit

P.O. Box 1320

Santa Cruz, CA 95061

