

A Parent's Handbook to Subsidized Child Care

Pennsylvania Department of Human Services
Office of Child Development and Early Learning
In partnership with
Early Learning Resource Centers
A PARTNERSHIP OF CARING

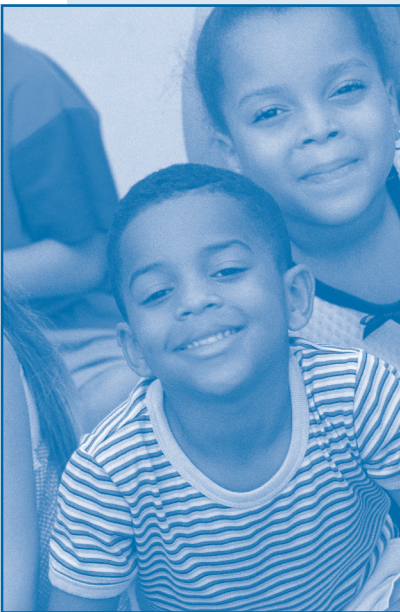
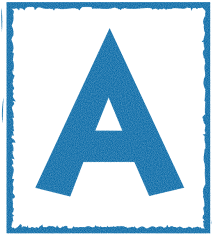




TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Letter to Parent/Caretakers Page 4
Questions & Answers about Subsidized Child Care

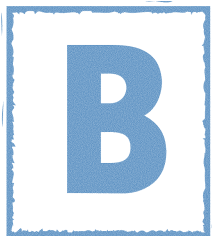


I need help finding and paying for child care.

Pages

5-8

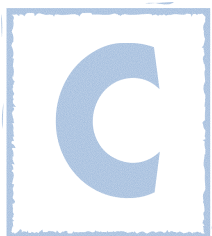
1. What is subsidized child care?..... 5
2. What is the Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC)?..... 5
3. What are the guidelines for the subsidized child care program?..... 5-6
4. How do I show that I meet the guidelines?..... 6
5. What if I have a special case?..... 7
6. When will my subsidized child care begin?..... 7
7. When my TANF cash assistance ends can I get subsidized child care?..... 8



Now that I meet the guidelines - What do I need to know?

Pages 9-12

1. Will I have to help pay for my child care?..... 9
2. How can I get help finding child care?..... 9
3. What types of child care programs are there?..... 9-10
4. What if my information changes? 11
5. What if I lose my job or become disabled? 11
6. What if I move to a new county? 12
7. How often will the ELRC review my case? 12



What are my rights and responsibilities in the subsidized child care program?

Pages 13-14

- Helpful Hints..... Page 14
Who can I call with more questions? Page 15



Office of Child Development & Early Learning
333 Market St., 6th Floor
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17126

Dear Parent/Caretaker:

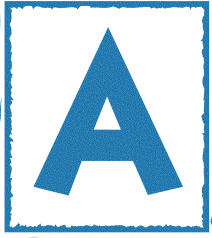
We welcome you to Pennsylvania’s subsidized child care program, a partnership between parents, providers, the Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC), and the Office of Child Development and Early Learning.

The children of Pennsylvania are the keys to tomorrow. We prepare our children during the early years so that they are ready for each stage of learning.

The subsidized child care program is administered by regional ELRCs. The staff members are trained to help you as you make your child care decisions. Your county’s ELRC is listed on the back of this handbook.

We hope that this Parent Handbook will answer your questions about subsidized child care. We look forward to working with you and your family.

Office of Child Development and Early Learning



I need help finding and paying for child care.

1. What is subsidized child care?

The subsidized child care program helps low-income families pay their child care fees. The state and federal governments fund this program, which is managed by the ELRC located in your region.

If you meet the guidelines:

- The ELRC will pay a part of your child care fee. *This is called a subsidy payment.*
- You will pay a part of the fee. *This is called the family co-pay.*
- The *subsidy payment* and the *family co-pay* go directly to the child care program.

Note: If your child care subsidy does not pay the full amount that your child care program charges, the provider may ask you to pay the difference between the subsidy payment and their private charges.

2. What is the Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC)?

The ELRC is the hub for child care information and child care help. You can call or visit the ELRC to request a subsidized child care application. You can also apply for subsidized child care on-line at www.compass.state.pa.us.

The ELRC will:

- Review your application to see if you meet the guidelines for the subsidized child care program.
- Help you find a child care program.
- Provide information and ideas about how to select the best possible early learning program or setting for your child.

If you receive TANF cash assistance benefits and attend an approved employment/training activity, ask your county assistance caseworker to refer you to the ELRC for child care assistance.

3. What are the guidelines for the subsidized child care program?

You must submit an application to the ELRC to see if you meet the guidelines for the subsidized child care program.

The following are the basic guidelines:

- You must live in Pennsylvania
- Have a child or children who need child care while you work or attend an education program
- Meet income guidelines for your family size
- Work 20 or more hours a week -or-
- Work 10 hours and train 10 hours a week
- Have a promise of a job that will start within 30 days of your application for subsidized child care
- Teen parents must attend an education program

-
- The child who needs care must be a citizen of the United States or an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residency
 - Have proof of identification for each parent or caretaker in the home
 - Have proof that each person on your application is a member of your family

4. How do I show that I meet the guidelines?

You must submit a subsidized child care application to the ELRC.

You may call the ELRC in your region to request an application. The ELRC will mail the application to you. You can also visit the ELRC to pick up an application or apply online at www.compass.state.pa.us.

Make sure that you read the directions on the application carefully. If you have any questions, call the ELRC. Complete all sections of the application and make sure that you sign and date the application before you return it to the ELRC. You may file your application in person, by mail, by fax or apply online.

Note: Please note that certain items that are needed to see if you meet the subsidized child care guidelines are based on your word and some require written proof.

If you are having problems getting the needed information, let the ELRC know right away. The ELRC may be able to help you get the information you are unable to obtain.

The ELRC will ask you to sign a consent form so that they can help you get the needed information.

The information you provide will be kept confidential. The information in your file will be used for your participation in the subsidized child care program.

- **You may self-certify information** - this means the ELRC will accept a statement from the parent or caretaker as proof of the following information:
 - (1) Age of Child
 - (2) Citizenship or immigration status
 - (3) Immunization status (shot records)
 - (4) Days and hours that a child needs care
 - (5) Former TANF status
 - (6) Extended time frame for a personal interview based on a hardship
- **You may self-declare information** - this means you do not have to submit written proof right away. You can tell the ELRC the information that is needed. You will then have 30 days to submit the proof. You will need to sign a form given to you by the ELRC.

*The ELRC will send you a notice to let you know if you meet the guidelines. This notice is called a **Child Care Eligible Notice**. If you do not meet the guidelines, the ELRC will send you a notice called a **Child Care Ineligible Notice**.*

5. What if I have a special case - can I get subsidized child care?

Maybe. The ELRC will let you know what you will need to submit for each special case.

The following are examples of special cases:

- **Disabled Child** - If you have a child between the ages of 13 and 19 who is physically or emotionally-disabled and unable to care for himself, that child may be eligible for the subsidized child care program.
- **Disabled Spouse** - If you have a disabled spouse who cannot care for your children while you work, your family may still meet the guidelines for the subsidized child care program. Your spouse will need to submit proof from their doctor or licensed psychologist.
- **Domestic Violence** - If you are a victim of domestic violence, you can request a waiver from the ELRC. A waiver means some of the guidelines will be delayed for a period of time. You will need to complete a form. The ELRC will never contact the person who is causing the domestic violence.
- **Shared Custody** - If you share custody of your child and you need child care while you work, you may meet the guidelines for the subsidized child care program. If you meet the guidelines, you will receive subsidy on the days that you have your child.
- **Foster Parent** - If you have a foster child and you need child care while you work, submit a subsidized child care application to the ELRC along with a letter from the county's Children and Youth Agency explaining that you are a foster parent and that the foster child needs child care.
- **Head Start Child** - If you have a child who is enrolled in a Head Start program and you need child care hours beyond the Head Start hours to continue working, submit proof of enrollment from the Head Start program.
- **Pre-Kindergarten Child** - If you have a child attending Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts or a pre-kindergarten program that is certified by the area school district and you need additional child care hours beyond the pre-kindergarten program to continue working, you will need to submit proof of enrollment from the school.

Please talk to your ELRC if you think you have a special case that is not listed.

6. When will my subsidized child care begin?

Once you meet the guidelines for the subsidized child care program, this is what will happen:

The ELRC will send you a Child Care Eligible Notice.

- a) **If funds are available**, you will need to do the following within 30 days:
 - I. Meet with the ELRC worker for a personal interview
 - II. Select a child care program that meets the provider standards of the Office of Child Development and Early Learning
 - III. Enroll your child in a child care program

If funds are available, subsidized child care payments may begin as soon as you choose a provider. The ELRC will let you know the start date of subsidized child care payments on the enrollment summary.

- b) **If funds are not available**
 - I. Your child's name will be placed on a waiting list
 - II. The ELRC will send you a letter when subsidized funds are available
 - III. When you receive the letter you will have 30 days to:
 - A. Meet with the ELRC worker for a personal interview
 - B. Select a child care program which meets the provider standards of the Office of Child Development and Early Learning
 - C. Enroll your child in a child care program

7. When my Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash ends, can I get subsidized child care?

If you receive TANF cash assistance benefits within the last six months and you have a child who needs care while you are working, you may meet the guidelines for continued subsidized child care.

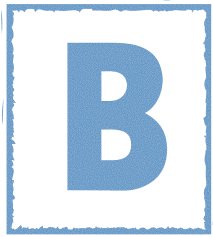
The ELRC will send a letter to families receiving TANF when their cash benefits end. The letter will let you know what you need to do to continue receiving subsidized child care or to begin receiving subsidized child care.

If you were getting child care assistance while you received TANF and are working, your case will be transferred to the ELRC when your TANF benefits end. This means your child care funding will continue from the date your cash closed.

If your TANF cash assistance benefits were closed and you did not receive a letter from the ELRC and you need child care, contact the ELRC right away.



“A partnership of caring - leads to successful outcomes.”



Now that I meet the guidelines - What do I need to know?

1. Will I have to help pay for my child care?

Yes. All families in the subsidized child care program pay a family co-pay amount. The co-pay is based on your family size and income. Your family co-pay will start on the first day that subsidized child care payments begin.

Important family co-pay information:

- Your family co-pay will not increase between redeterminations.
- If your income decreases, you can notify the ELRC. Your co-pay may be lowered based on the new information.
- The family co-pay is due on the first day of each week.
- If you do not pay your co-pay each week, you will become ineligible for subsidized child care.

2. How can I get help finding child care?

Call the ELRC. A parent services staff will talk to you about child care options. You will get a list of child care programs that you can call or schedule an appointment to visit. You can also do your own provider search through the online child care provider search located on the COMPASS website.

3. What types of child care programs are there?

There are over 7,000 certified child care programs in Pennsylvania. These include center, group, and family child care homes. The Office of Child Development and Early Learning inspects all certified centers, group child care, and family child care homes once a year. Unannounced visits are also made to those certified programs.

Each teacher, assistant teacher and aide in a certified child care program must:

- meet educational guidelines
- participate in on-going professional development
- pass Federal and State clearances which include fingerprinting, criminal history and child abuse clearances
- have a health assessment

“We prepare our children so that they are ready for each stage of learning.”

Child care centers, group, and family child care homes must have a Certificate of Compliance to operate in Pennsylvania.

The Certificate of Compliance must be posted at the location. It will show the name and address of the program, the number of children they are allowed to care for and the expiration date of the certificate.

The following provider types are uncertified. To receive subsidized child care payments, these providers must pass Federal and State clearances which include fingerprinting, criminal history and child abuse clearances.

The uncertified providers include:

- Relative provider
A relative provider can only care for up to three children at any one time. A relative is defined as the child's grandparent, great-grandparent, aunt, uncle, or sibling over the age of 18 who does not live with the child.
- In-home provider
This is a relative provider, who cares for your child in your home. You are considered the employer. You must pay this provider at least the minimum wage and pay all required federal and state taxes as an employer.

Subsidized child care payments can only be made to an in-home provider under the following special conditions:

- If you work between the hours of 9:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. or
- If care outside the home is a risk to the child's health. (The child's health condition must be documented by a licensed physician or psychologist. The letter must also explain why the child needs in-home care.)



Pennsylvania offers a special program called **Keystone STARS** to certified providers. **Keystone STARS** is a quality improvement program that helps child care providers develop and train staff to support a child's development, early learning and school readiness.

Providers who have a **Keystone STARS** rating have met additional quality standards established by the Department of Human Services.

4. What if my information changes?

Call your ELRC. Changes are helpful to report just in case the ELRC needs to contact you.

The ELRC will work with you whenever there are changes in your information.

CHANGES THAT MUST BE REPORTED WITHIN 10 DAYS OF THE CHANGE:	
A change in the days and hours child care is needed	A change in your child care provider
Change of address	An increase in income over 85% of the median income
CHANGES THAT ARE HELPFUL TO REPORT	
A decrease in pay	A change in family size
A new home telephone number	

5. What if I lose my job or become disabled?

If you lose your job:

- Contact the ELRC. Your family co-pay may be lowered based on the new information.

Talk to the ELRC about your child care options when you go on Family leave, Disability or Maternity Leave.

- You may continue to send your child who is receiving care to the child care program -or-
- You may suspend subsidy until you return to work.

Note for parent/caretakers on Maternity Leave - Let the ELRC know if you will need child care for your newborn. If funds are available, care may begin once you return to work. If funds are not available, your newborn will be placed on the prioritized waiting list from the date of your request.

6. What if I move to a new county/region?

If you move to a new region, your subsidized child care funding will continue based on your new information. The ELRC will transfer your records to the ELRC in the new region. You should let the ELRC know before you move so that subsidized child care payments will continue. The ELRC in the new region will also help you locate a new child care program.

7. How often will the ELRC review my case?

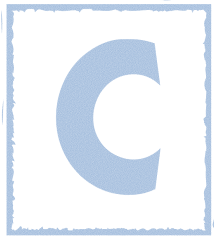
Once you complete your application and meet the guidelines for the subsidized child care program, the ELRC will review your case every 12 months. This process is called a redetermination of eligibility.

A **redetermination** means the ELRC will review your family income, work and training status and your continued need for subsidized child care. You must provide up-to-date proof of your family's income at each redetermination.

You will not need to provide any other proof unless there has been:

- A drop in your hours of work, education or training below an average of 20 hours per week
- A new job
- A change in your family size

The ELRC will mail a Redetermination Summary to your home address. It will include the date that you will need to submit your up-to-date information. You may fax, mail or bring your information to the ELRC or complete your redetermination online at www.compass.state.pa.us.



What are my rights and responsibilities in the subsidized child care program?

Parent/Caretaker Rights:

You have the right to be treated fairly and with respect

1. **You have the right not to be discriminated against.** You and your family may not be discriminated against in the subsidized child care program on the basis of age, race, sex, color, religious creed, national or ethnic origin, ancestry, sexual preference or physical or mental disability.
2. **You have the right to examine your file.** The family file contains information that is used to determine your eligibility for the subsidized child care program. A parent/caretaker or his/her representative, or a person who was given permission by the parent/caretaker has a right to examine his or her file in the ELRC.
3. **You have the right to a timely decision.** You have the right to file your signed application online at any time or on any day that the ELRC is open for business. The ELRC will review your application right away to make sure that you have all of the needed documents.

If information is missing, you will receive a **Missing information letter** telling you what you need to submit.

The ELRC must make a determination of eligibility within 10 days of the date that all required information is received.

The ELRC may not delay a decision on your application beyond 30 days from the date your completed application was received.

4. **You have a right to a written notice.** You have the right to receive a written notice from the ELRC whenever a decision is made that affects your eligibility for the subsidized child care program. This includes decisions denying subsidy, terminating subsidy, setting or changing co-payments, denying a domestic violence waiver, suspending or disrupting subsidy.

There are several types of notices:

- Child Care Eligible Notice
- Child Care Ineligible Notice
- Child Care Confirmation Notice
- Notice of Adverse Action
- Notice of Overpayment
- Notice Confirming Voluntary Withdrawal

5. **You have the right to appeal any decision or action made by the ELRC.** You have the right to appeal any decision, action or failure to act by the ELRC that affects your family's eligibility for the subsidized child care program. This includes denial of subsidy, termination of subsidy, computation of the co-payment, denial of a domestic violence waiver, failure of the ELRC to act upon a request for subsidy within the required time limits, or suspension or disruption of subsidy.
6. **You have the right to have your subsidy continue pending a hearing** whenever you get a Notice of Adverse Action proposing to terminate your subsidized child care.

A **Notice of Adverse Action** is the type of notice that is used if the ELRC plans to end (terminate) your subsidy.

The Notice of Adverse Action lists:

- The proposed date that subsidized funding will end
- The regulation that you have failed to meet
- How to file an appeal
- The deadline date to file your appeal
- The address and telephone number of the County Legal Services Office.

Note: If you appeal within 10 days of the date of the Notice of Adverse Action, you may continue to receive subsidized child care until your appeal is decided.

If subsidized funding continues during the appeal and the appeal is decided in favor of the ELRC, you will have to pay back the amount of the subsidy that you received during the appeal, unless the hearing officer determines that paying the amount back would create a hardship for your family.

7. **You have the right to choose care from any eligible provider who agrees** to abide by the provider standards of the Office of Child Development and Early Learning.
Each provider must sign a provider agreement before the ELRC will subsidize the child care cost at the site. The ELRC will notify the provider as to when subsidized child care payments will begin.
8. **You have the right to view the rules and regulations for subsidized child care.** The rules and regulations for subsidized child care eligibility can be viewed and printed from the internet. If you do not have a computer, you can get a copy of the regulations from your ELRC.
 1. Go to www.pacode.com
 2. Click on Browse (a menu will appear)
 3. Select 55-Public Welfare
 4. Scroll down to Chapter 3041 - Subsidized Child Care Eligibility

**Title 55 - Public Welfare
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
[55 PA.CODE CHAPTER 3041]
Subsidized Child Care Eligibility**

Parent/Caretaker Responsibilities:

As a parent/caretaker who receives subsidized child care, the following are your most important responsibilities:

1. **Submit true information to the ELRC.**
2. **Report changes in a timely manner.**
3. **Pay your family co-pay on time.**

Helpful Hints

Attend	Your child should attend the child care program on all days assigned. If your child is absent or ill, please call your provider.
Call	Call your ELRC if you have any questions.
Changes	If there are changes that may affect your child care needs, call the ELRC.
Pay	Always pay your family co-pay on time.
Read	Read all information that you receive from the ELRC. If you do not understand or have questions, call the ELRC.
Save	Save your pay stubs or the information that you get showing how much money you earn monthly. This will help you when it is time to show proof of income earned.
Tell	Tell your friends about the subsidized child care program.
Transfer	If you want to transfer to a new child care program, call the ELRC.

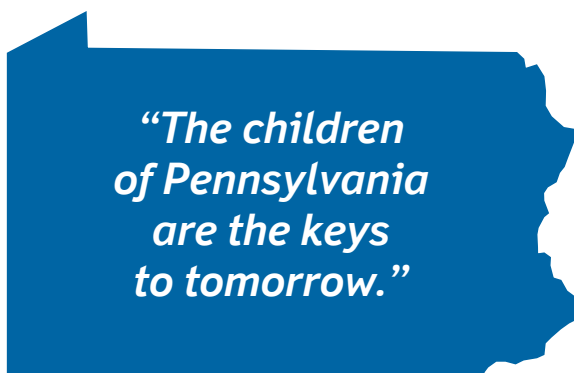
More Questions ...

Who can I call if I have child care concerns?

- Subsidized Child Care Concerns** If you have questions about child care subsidy, call your ELRC. If you are not satisfied ask to speak to a supervisor. Your ELRC number is listed on the back of this handbook.
- Legal Services** If you need help with an appeal, a fair hearing or you need legal advice about your eligibility for subsidized child care, call the legal services office. The number is listed on the back of this handbook.
- Provider Concerns** If you think something is wrong with your child care program or if you see mistreatment of a child, call the Regional Office of Child Development and Early Learning. The number is listed below.
- Keystone STARS** If you would like to locate a Keystone STARS provider in your area, call your ELRC. The ELRC number is listed on the back of this handbook. You can also find Keystone STARS providers by visiting the child care provider search located on the COMPASS website.

Important Telephone Numbers ...

OFFICE	REGION	TOLL FREE NUMBER
Office of Child Development and Early Learning	Central Region	1-800-222-2117
	Northeast Region	1-800-222-2108
	Southeast Region	1-800-346-2929
	Western Region	1-800-222-2149
Legal Services	Statewide	1-800-322-7572
ELRC	Listed on the back of this handbook	



ELRC

For Legal Services call:
1-800-322-7572

The Web address is:
www.palegalaid.net

This program is made possible by the



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES