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# Child Care Options: Accessing Available Resources

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RIGHTS



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Child Care Options

**Q: Where can families find child care in California?**

**A:** Families should start by contacting their local Resource & Referral (R&R) agency to find child care. Every county in California has at least one child care R&R that helps families find child care that best meets their needs and determines whether they qualify for publicly-funded child care (subsidized child care). Parents, including resource families and parenting foster youth, can use this website to find their local R&R for child care assistance: <https://rrnetwork.org/family-services/find-child-care>

**Q: How can families get help paying for child care in California?**

**A:** Publicly-funded child care (subsidized child care) is available in California. Depending on family circumstances, publicly-funded child care may be free or reduced cost. Families can learn more about publicly-funded child care at their local R&R.

**Q: How is most publicly-funded child care paid for in California?**

**A:** The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) contracts with [Alternative Payment Programs](#) (APPs), public and private nonprofit agencies, to administer most publicly-funded vouchers that families use to help pay for child care.

APPs determine a family's eligibility for child care vouchers. They decide whether to place a family on the waiting list for a voucher and where on the waiting list they fall. The APP assesses what family fee (share of cost), if any, is owed.

Qualifying parents, resource families, and caregivers may use their child care voucher to help pay for child care in a licensed family child care home, licensed child care center, or with a family, friend, or neighbor who may be unlicensed. The APP then pays the selected child care provider directly or reimburses the parent who pays. The use of vouchers is intended to give families access to the many types of child care and allow them to choose the type most suited to their needs. If an unlicensed family, friend, or neighbor is paid with a child care voucher, they must pass a criminal background check unless they are a close relative. If the child is under the county's jurisdiction, the resource parent must check with the social worker about whether they are allowed to use unlicensed family, friend, or neighbor care in that county.

County Welfare departments administer CalWORKs Stage 1 child care vouchers or subcontracts with APPs to do so.

The California Department of Education's Early Education Division funds/directly contracts with California State Preschool Program centers (CSPP) for 3- and 4-year-olds through local educational agencies (LEAs), colleges, community-action agencies, and

private nonprofit agencies. Families can usually go to the CSPP to see if they qualify for and can enroll in the program, or they may be able to use their AP voucher for CSPP.

**Q: What are the child care options for families in California?**

**A:** California offers a variety of publicly-funded child care programs that help families, including resource families and foster youth who are parents, pay for emergency and long-term, continuous child care. These programs include:

- CalWORKs child care
- Alternative Payment Program (APP) Voucher & Contract-based child care
- California State Preschool Program (CSPP)
- Head Start & Early Head Start
- Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children
- Transitional Kindergarten (TK).

Many of these child care programs offer special consideration for families with children in formal and informal out-of-home placement.

The Emergency Child Care Bridge Program is *just one of these programs* and has more limitations than the other child care programs. All publicly-funded (subsidized child care) options should be presented to Resource Families and foster youth who are parents.

**Q: Can you provide more details about the child care options for families in California?**

**A:** Several programs offer publicly-funded child care in California. Each program has specific eligibility and age criteria:

**CalWORKs Child Care (vouchers):** CalWORKs Child Care has three stages:

- **Stage 1:** Entitlement for parents or guardians receiving CalWORKs cash assistance or who received cash assistance in the past 24 months and are working or engaged or want to engage in a Welfare-to-Work (WTW) activity, such as attending parenting classes; education-related appointments for their child; domestic violence, substance use or mental health counseling; court and medical appointments; or searching for a job or home. Parents and guardians have good cause for not participating in their WTW activity if they cannot find suitable child care. Families are entitled to stay in Stage 1 for at least 12 months or until they are transferred to Stage 2.
- **Stage 2:** Entitlement for parents or guardians who received CalWORKs cash assistance in the past 24 months or a lump-sum diversion payment or services. See AP Voucher & Contract-Based Child Care below for eligibility requirements.
- **Stage 3:** Subject to enough funding, families are transferred to Stage 3 after 24 months of receiving cash assistance or if they received a lump-sum diversion payment or services. See AP Voucher & Contract-Based Child Care below for eligibility requirements.

Families get immediate, continuous CalWORKs child care for children in their care, including children in formal and informal out-of-home care, for at least 12 months until recertification. Child care is available until the child is 13 years old or until the child is 21 years old if they have a disability. Qualifying families should not be put on a subsidized child care waiting list for CalWORKs stages 1 & 2 as these are entitlement programs. CalWORKs child care is in the form of a voucher. The local Child Welfare Agency or APP usually makes the voucher payment directly to the child care provider. Families can choose a child care center, family child care home, or family, friend, or neighbor setting that best meets their needs.\*

**AP Voucher & Contract-Based Child Care (including CalWORKs Stages 2 & 3):**

Families with children who receive child protective services or are at risk of abuse, neglect, or exploitation qualify for child care and have priority on the waiting list regardless of the family's income. The child does not need to be in foster care or with a certified resource family to qualify. Families who qualify on this basis must receive a written referral from a:

- Legal, medical, or social services agency;
- Local educational agency liaison for homeless children and youths designated under Section 11432(g)(1)(J)(ii) of Title 42 of the United States Code;
- Head Start program; or
- Emergency or transitional shelter.

Other families qualify for child care based on income, if they receive CalWORKs cash assistance, or if they are experiencing homelessness and the parent or guardian has a “need” for child care, such as working, attending school, or searching for a job or home. Families have continuous eligibility for at least 12 months until recertification, until the child is 13 years old, or until the child is 21 years old if the child has a disability. Families can choose a child care center, family child care home, or family, friend, or neighbor setting that best meets their needs.\*

**California State Preschool Program (CSPP):** State preschool programs offer both part-day and full-day services. They provide a curriculum for children ages 3 and 4 that is developmentally appropriate and fits with children's cultures and the languages they speak at home. The program also provides meals and snacks to children, parent education, referrals to health and social services for families, and staff development opportunities to employees.

AP voucher and contract-based child care eligibility requirements apply, but with some exceptions: CSPP is for children ages 4-5; no “need” requirements for part-day CSPP. CSPPs are located on school campuses and in neighborhoods.

**Head Start & Early Head Start:** Families with children in foster care, families experiencing homelessness, or families receiving Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) qualify regardless of their income. The program prioritizes families with children in foster care for enrollment. Other families must qualify based on their income which must be below the federal poverty guidelines. This federally funded and administered program offers comprehensive social, emotional, health, parenting support, and educational services to

families. Head Start is for children ages 3 to 5, and Early Head Start is for pregnant women and children under age 3.

**Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children:** Emergency child care vouchers are for approved resource families, families in the resource family approval process, and parents under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court, including but not limited to nonminor dependent parents. There are no income requirements, but resource parents must need child care, such as working or attending school. Availability depends on funding and county policy.

Child care is provided for up to 6 months and sometimes up to 12 months with navigation support to find and transfer families to long-term child care. Trauma-informed training is available to child care providers. Care is available to children up to age 12 and for children with disabilities up to age 21. Families can choose a child care center, family child care home, or family, friend, or neighbor settings that best meet their needs.\*

(Reference: CDSS [ACL 21-44](#))

\*Some counties do not allow guardians to use family, friend, and neighbor child care for children in foster care.

**Transitional Kindergarten:** No-cost early care & education for 4-year-olds offered on school campuses. Parents and guardians with child care subsidies may keep their 4-year-old children in non-school settings if they prefer.

## Emergency Child Care Bridge Program Process

**Q: What does the Bridge Program offer?**

**A:** A resource family may receive a time-limited (6-12 months) voucher to assist with child care costs for children in the foster care system from birth through age 12 and for youth with exceptional needs up to age 21. A voucher may be issued for up to 6 months or until the child is successfully transitioned until long-term subsidized child care. The county has the discretion to extend eligibility for an additional six months.

The child care navigator, employed by a local Resource & Referral (R&R) agency, works with the resource family to assess child care opportunities. Child care navigator services are available to any child in foster care, any child previously in foster care who has returned to their home of origin, and any child of parents involved in the child welfare system.

Through the Bridge Program, child care providers have access to trauma-informed care training and coaching. Training and coaching are intended to help child care providers learn practical strategies for working with children who have experienced trauma.

**Q: How does a resource family or parenting foster youth access the Bridge Program?**

**A:** If the county participates in the [Bridge Program](#), the child's social worker makes the referral to the local Resource & Referral (R&R) agency. A child care navigator, employed by the R&R, contacts the resource family or parenting foster youth and helps identify child care options that meet the family's needs.

**Q: What is the turnaround time for a child to start a Bridge Program once the social worker makes a referral?**

**A:** The child's social worker makes a referral to the local Resource & Referral (R&R) agency. The time between making the referral and starting child care varies depending on several factors, including:

- Whether child care has been identified or needs to be secured;
- Availability of a provider to start caring for the child;
- Completion of paperwork by the resource family;
- The agency's referral processes (number of approvals necessary, etc.).

Depending on these local factors, the time can vary from as little as 24-hours to a week or more.

## Emergency Child Care Bridge Program Eligibility

**Q: Can a family member who has an emergency placement, but has not completed Resource Family Approval (RFA), access the Emergency Child Care Bridge Program?**

**A:** Participating counties shall determine eligibility for the Bridge Program using the criteria for eligible populations outlined below:

- Approved resource families;
- Families that have a child placed with them for an emergency or compelling reason and are in the process of RFA;
- Formerly licensed foster family homes or certified family homes; approved homes of relatives or Non-Related Extended Family Members in the process of RFA as of 12/31/20;
- Parenting foster youth and nonminor dependent parents, and Tribally approved homes.

(Reference: CDSS [ACL 21-44](#))

**Q: Parenting youth in foster care are eligible for the Bridge Program. Are nonminor dependents eligible, too?**

**A:** Yes, nonminor dependent parents are eligible for the Bridge Program.

## Emergency Child Care Bridge Program Child Care Navigator

**Q:** How or where can the child care navigator be reached?

**A:** The child's social worker makes the Bridge Program referral to the local Resource and Referral (R&R) agency. Resource and Referral (R&R) agencies employ child care navigators. Contact the local [R&R](#) to reach a child care navigator.