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SonomaWORKS Child Care A Handbook for Parents and Providers

Introduction

This handbook is for parents and child care providers who will be working with the SonomaWORKS Child Care program. This booklet will tell you what you can expect from the program, what is expected of the parents on SonomaWORKS, and what is expected of those who provide child care for SonomaWORKS parents.

The SonomaWORKS Child Care Program provides help with child care payments so that parents can go to work or participate in other activities required by SonomaWORKS.

Parents will have to meet both the SonomaWORKS cash aid requirements and SonomaWORKS child care requirements to qualify for help with child care. Providers must meet SonomaWORKS Child Care requirements in order to receive payment. Most of the rules for both parents and providers are set by the State Department of Social Services or the California Department of Education.

The SonomaWORKS Child Care Program is the first stage of a larger program, the CalWORKs Child Care Program. Once your need for child care becomes stable, you will move on to Stages 2 and 3 of the CalWORKs Child Care Program.

Stages 2 and 3 are handled and paid for by three local non-profit agencies: Community Child Care Council (4Cs) of Sonoma County, Professional Association for Childhood Education Alternative - Payment Program (PACE-APP), and River Child Care Services (RCCS).

You can move to Stage 2 or 3 and continue to receive cash aid from SonomaWORKS.

General Information for Parents

When you get SonomaWORKS cash aid, and you are working or going to approved work activities, you can also get SonomaWORKS child care. You must be cooperating with the SonomaWORKS program to receive child care and follow the rules outlined in this handbook.

The SonomaWORKS Child Care program pays for child care as soon as you start work activities. The program is designed to set up and approve your child care as quickly as possible. In order to do that, we need some information from you in order to make correct payments, as required by state law.

To qualify for child care payments, you must request child care from your worker and provide the information that we need within 30 calendar days, including the information

from your child care provider. If you don't do that, we may deny your request for child care payments. If your request is denied, you can ask again at any time.

We will **not** pay for child care that you used more than 30 days before you applied for SonomaWORKS child care.

Your worker is the person who authorizes your child care payment. Your worker can only authorize child care for the following times:

- the hours you work
- the hours in which you take part in a Welfare to Work activity
- the time you spend traveling between work (or a Welfare to Work activity) and the child care provider

While your child care is being paid by SonomaWORKS, you will need to make sure to tell your worker if your schedule of work or Welfare to Work activities changes. **If your worker does not know about a schedule change, we may not be able to pay for child care for the changed hours.**

When SonomaWORKS Child Care first starts, you will receive a Child Care Request and Authorization form, other required forms, and a return envelope. The Child Care Request and Authorization will show the number of hours of SonomaWORKS-paid child care that you are authorized to receive. Take these forms to the provider you have chosen. Both you and the child care provider will need to complete and sign the forms. Once the forms are signed, mail them back using the return envelope.

The amount SonomaWORKS can pay to your provider is determined by four things:

- The hours that your worker has authorized
- The amount your provider normally charges per hour
- The hours of child care that you actually use
- Payment limits that are set by the state.

If your provider charges more than the state allows, you will have to pay the difference. The amount you pay is called a co-pay. If you use child care for hours that we cannot approve, you will be responsible for paying for those hours.

If you have an increase in income, you may be required to pay part of your child care, referred to as a "family fee". If you have a family fee, we will send written notice explaining it to you. **You will be responsible for paying your child care provider any amounts that SonomaWORKS cannot pay.**

Your child care provider will be paid by our SonomaWORKS Fiscal Unit. A Child Care Authorization Clerk will work with your child care provider to answer any questions that may come up about payment and rates. In some cases, the Child Care Authorization Clerk may need to work with you to set up the payment system.

You may choose which child care provider to use. If you do not yet have a child care provider, see the section on “Choosing a Provider” in this handbook. We will pay any provider that you choose, unless there is a legal reason that we cannot.

People we cannot pay to provide child care include the child’s parents, adults who are on cash aid with you, anyone under 18 years of age, or people who do not pass a child abuse and criminal background check. More information about the background check can be found at www.trustline.org.

Eligibility

In general, you must be eligible under SonomaWORKS in order to receive help with child care. This means that you must meet the limits and rules regarding income, property, and family status. Once we are able to approve child care payments for you, your eligibility will be based on the rules for age and income listed below. These are the same rules that are used in the programs operated by 4Cs, PACE-APP, and RCCS.

Children’s Age

SonomaWORKS will pay for child care for children age 12 or under. **There are some limitations on child care payments for 11 and 12 year olds. If your child is 11 or 12 and needs child care, talk to your worker about it.** Except as noted below, eligibility for child care will end once a child turns 13.

SonomaWORKS will continue to pay for child care for the following children past the age of 13:

1. Children who are 13 to 18 years old that require care because they are unable to care for themselves. Children are considered unable to care for themselves if they receive SSI/SSP, or if there is a written statement from a doctor or a psychologist stating that they cannot care for themselves.
2. Children who are 13 to 18 years old and are either Dependents of the Court or Wards of the Court.

Income Eligibility

While you get cash aid, you will automatically meet the income limit for child care.

You may continue to get help paying for child care even when you no longer receive SonomaWORKS cash aid for 2 years if you continue to meet eligibility requirements.

You will become ineligible for child care when your family income exceeds 75% of the state median income. This income limit applies whether your child care is paid by SonomaWORKS, 4Cs, PACE-APP, or RCCS.

The state gives SonomaWORKS, 4Cs, PACE-APP, and RCCS a chart that shows the income limit, based on family size. All four agencies use the same income limit. If you need to know what that limit is, you can ask the agency that pays for your child care

Choosing a Provider

You decide who provides care for your child. You are encouraged to choose a child care provider who will provide quality child care and who will meet the individual needs of your children. In order to help you choose a child care provider, you may be referred to the Resource and Referral Program of either 4Cs or RCCS. Your worker will give you the phone number to contact the agency in your area. You may also go directly to their offices for help.

You may choose any of the following types of providers:

- Licensed Day Care Centers
- Licensed Family Day Care Homes
- Extended Day Care provided through the school system
- Recreational programs, such as the YMCA year-round or vacation programs.
- License-exempt caregivers, including relatives and non-related people who meet certain conditions

All child-care programs must provide adult supervision of the children and maintain sign-in/sign-out records. We cannot pay for programs where children can come and go on their own.

When choosing child care it is important to consider the health, happiness, and proper development of your child. When choosing a child care provider, you may want to consider some or all of the following questions:

- Is the child care provider warm, loving, and knowledgeable about how children develop?
- Will the care be provided in a clean, safe, warm and comfortable place?
- Are the other children that the provider cares for happy and well cared-for?
- Is there space outdoors for play and exercise?
- Is there space for quiet play and naps?
- Is the bathroom or toileting area set up to be easy for children to use?
- Is there a variety of toys and equipment, and are these things in good condition?
- Does the provider provide play and learning that is appropriate for your child's age?
- Does the provider provide nutritious meals and snacks?

- What methods of discipline does the provider use? **It is against the law for licensed centers and family day care homes to use physical punishment.**
- Are all cleaning supplies, medicines and dangerous objects out of reach?
- Can you visit your child at any time while he or she is being cared for?

If you don't know the child care provider, it is a good idea to ask the provider for names and phone numbers of parents who are willing to give the provider a reference. It is also a good idea to visit more than one provider. The perfect provider for your child may be the first you visit, or the last.

Unlicensed Providers

If you want to have a friend or relative provide the care for your children, we will be able to pay them for providing child care if they meet certain requirements. These people are called "license-exempt providers." There are several things that you need to know if you choose to use license-exempt providers.

Under state law, a person may provide child care without needing a license if they meet the following requirements:

- The provider is over 18 years old; *and*
- The provider is only providing care for your children in addition to their own or children of relatives; *or*
- The provider is a relative of your children as defined by the State of California Trustline Registry.

Most license-exempt providers must have their fingerprints checked and a background check done to make sure that it is safe to leave your child with them.

Most license-exempt providers and parents must sign a form that certifies that the place where they are caring for your child is safe. This form lists a number of things required by the state's Health and Safety Code.

If a license-exempt provider comes to your home to provide care, you must make sure all minimum wage and labor laws are being followed.

No matter what type of provider you choose, you are the employer.

General Information for Providers

The SonomaWORKS Child Care program supports SonomaWORKS families in their efforts to become self-sufficient by helping to pay for child care. We work with child care providers to meet the parents' need for child care.

The parent is the one who hires you to provide child care. We will pay a child care subsidy for them, based on the amount that is allowed under state law. We will make that payment directly to you. The parent is responsible for paying any amounts that we do not cover.

Some important things to remember:

- Child care can only be paid for children under 13 years of age, unless they are disabled or wards of the court.
- Child care cannot be paid for time the child is in school or in another subsidized program.
- We cannot pay to hold child care "slots." Payments are made for the specific child and for the time that he or she is actually in care.
- We cannot pay more than you would charge a privately-paying parent for the same hours.
- Parents are responsible for paying for child care that is not authorized, or for the costs of care over the amount we can pay.

Our SonomaWORKS Fiscal Unit is responsible for determining the amounts that we are allowed to pay for child care. That amount is based on the hours authorized by the parent's caseworker and the limits provided under state law.

You will be provided with the name of the Child Care Authorization Clerk responsible for this determination. If you have any questions about the hours that have been authorized or the state limits, you need to call the Child Care Authorization Clerk.

If the parent makes any schedule changes, we need to know about those changes. Tell the parent to report schedule changes to his or her worker

Under current regulations, the parent may only be required to report to us every three months. However, child care subsidies are based on the actual care provided monthly and the amount that was originally approved. You may want to contact the Authorization Clerk to be sure that changes are reported so that the child care payment is correct.

When it is legal for us to do so, we will send you copies of the notices that we send the parent. We will always send you copies of the Child Care Request and Authorization form once it is completed. Also, we will send you revisions to the Child Care Request and Authorization form whenever we become aware of changes in the parent's eligibility. If you have any questions about these, please call the Authorization Clerk.

Payment Policies

General

Child care payments are made monthly, in the month **after** care was provided. Payment is based on the agreement on the Child Care Request and Authorization form and proof of actual care provided, as shown on the Child Care Expense Claim form. Usually, we will mail payment within 10 business days of **receiving** a Child Care Expense Claim form that is properly completed.

Parents are responsible for paying for child care that has not been approved by their worker. Parents are also responsible for paying for any child care fees that exceed the limit of what we can pay. The parent and the provider need to make their own arrangements for paying these amounts.

Establishing an Agreement

The Child Care Request and Authorization form is used to show the days and hours of child care needed and the payment agreement between the parent, the provider, and SonomaWORKS. This form is used to set up the initial agreement and may be used to record changes in the authorization.

A separate set of forms will be filled out for each provider who cares for the children. It is possible to include more than one child on a form, depending on the number of children who need care.

The parent's case worker can only authorize child care hours for the times that the parent is working or attending required work activities. The Child Care Authorization Clerk will adjust those hours to allow for transportation time from the provider's location to the work activity and back.

We are not allowed to authorize hours for the time when an adult in the child's family is available and able to provide care, when the child is in school, or when the child is in another subsidized program.

In order to make the first payment we must have all required documents, signed by both the parent and provider. We can only accept original signatures, so you cannot fax or e-mail copies of the forms. When we are working with you to set up payment, we will determine which forms are required. At minimum, we will need the Child Care Request and Authorization, an expense claim form, and a Payee Data Record (PDR) before we can issue a payment.

Once the Child Care Request and Authorization is completed and signed by both the parent and the provider, the Child Care Authorization Clerk can determine the rate that we can use for payment. The following information is used to determine the rate:

- The certified need for care based on the hours authorized.
- The completed Child Care Request and Authorization form.
- A copy of any standard contract or agreement issued by a licensed provider to their clients.
- The age of the child
- The type of provider
- Whether the authorized hours are full-time or part-time.
- The usual local rate for child care, determined by the state

Once we have established the rate that we can pay, the information will be listed on the Child Care Request and Authorization form. **The form will indicate the amount that we can pay and any amounts that the parent must pay as a family fee.** A copy of the completed form will be mailed to both the provider and the parent. In addition, a formal Notice of Action will be mailed to the parent.

Payment Process

Once a child care agreement is approved, payments are based on the monthly Child Care Expense Claim forms that we will send to the provider. These forms show the times and days that the child received care. Any time that the provider is claiming for payment must be listed on this form. The parent must sign the form to verify that the time claimed is correct. **Both the parent and the provider must sign to state, under penalty of perjury, that the information on the form is correct.**

We are unable to process a claim for child care until the Child Care Expense Claim form is properly completed. A Child Care Expense Claim form is properly completed when both the parent and the provider answer all the questions, and both sign it. If any question is not answered clearly and completely, payment may be delayed.

We process the Child Care Expense Claim forms in the order in which they were received. The forms can be submitted any time during the month. The earlier you submit the form, the sooner a payment can be issued. **Once we receive the properly completed form, you can expect a payment within 10 business days.**

Family Fees and Co-Pays

A family fee is required when a family's income is over the limit set by the state. Generally, the income level of families who receive cash aid is expected to be low enough that they will not be required to pay a family fee. The caseworker will figure out if a family fee is required.

When a SonomaWORKS family is required to pay a family fee, the provider and the family will be notified. **The parent pays the family fee to the provider.** The Child Care

Expense Claim form will have a place for the provider to indicate that the fee has been paid. The payment that SonomaWORKS makes to the provider will be reduced by the amount of the family fee. SonomaWORKS does not collect family fee payments

A **co-pay** is required when the provider's hourly rate is more than SonomaWORKS pays or there are hours of care that we cannot authorize.

It is possible for a parent may have both a family fee and a co-pay. **Both fees are the parent's responsibility.**

Payment during a Child's Absence

If the provider normally charges for days that a child does not show up for care as scheduled, we **may** be able to pay for those days if the child's absence is **excused**.

Payment can be made for days the child is absent if the following criteria are met:

1. The provider is a licensed provider, center, or a license-exempt program. (License-exempt individuals cannot be paid if a child is absent)
2. The provider has given us with a written copy of his or her policy on charging for a child's absence. This policy must be the same for all the families the provider serves.
3. The specific reason for the absence is documented and signed by the parent.
4. The day of the absence is part of the approved schedule for the child to be in care.

Absences are excused for the following reasons:

1. Illness or quarantine of the child when the specific type of illness is stated (for example, a cold or flu)
2. The parent's illness or quarantine
3. Court ordered visitations, when a record of these is on file
4. Family emergency or crisis
5. A reason that is clearly in the best interest of the child, such as a day spent with a family member or a special trip with a school program.

There is a limit of ten excused absences during the period between July 1 of one year to June 30 of the next year. We will not pay for excused absences that last more than 10 calendar days. After 10 calendar days the absences are considered unexcused. **We will not pay for unexcused absences or for absences that are not explained.**

Absence of the Parent from Work or Work Activities

Parents who do not attend required work activities are normally not eligible for payment of child care. When a payment is made for a day when the parent did not attend work activities, it can cause overpayment.

If a child is not brought to the provider during the first week of the authorized time period, the authorization will be cancelled and no payment will be made.

Unexcused absences of more than three scheduled days must be reported by the provider to the Child Care Authorization Clerk. Failure to contact the Child Care Authorization Clerk may result in a reduced amount that we can pay.

Provider Holidays or Other Closures

We may pay up to 10 days per fiscal year when the provider charges for his or her holidays, vacations or other days of non-operation, if the following criteria are met:

1. The provider is a licensed provider, center, or a license exempt program. (License-exempt individuals cannot be paid for holidays)
2. The provider has provided us with a written copy of his or her policies on vacations and holidays with all families showing that they charge for specific days of non-operation.
3. The day of the non-operation is part of the approved schedule for the child to be in care.
4. We have not previously paid the provider for 10 days of non-operation during the period between July 1 of one year and June 30 of the next year.

Child Care with an Alternate Provider

There are two times that we can pay a child's regular provider and an alternate provider during the same time period. There are limits on those payments in either case.

When the Child is Sick

We can pay both providers when the child has an excused absence from the regular provider if the following criteria are met:

- The regular provider is being paid under the rules listed in the section on "Payment during a Child's Absence."
- The alternate provider is eligible to be paid as a regular provider under the rules described in this handbook.
- There is a limit of 10 days of payments to alternative providers for the child's illness during the period from July 1 of one year through June 30 of the next year.

During Days that the Regular Provider is Closed

We can pay both providers when the child is unable to go to their regular provider due to the provider's verified closure for holidays or vacations if the following criteria are met:

- The regular provider is being paid under the rules listed in the section on "Provider Holidays or Other Closures."
- The alternate provider is eligible to be paid as regular provider under the rules described in this handbook.

- There is a limit of 10 days of payments to alternative providers due to the regular provider's closure during the period from July 1 of one year through June 30 of the next year.

There are separate 10 day limits for each of the reasons above. We will not count a day of excused illness against the limit for the regular provider's closure; nor will we count a day of the regular provider's closure against the limit for excused illness.

Reporting Changes in Child Care Agreements

Parent Information

Changes to your child care agreement are required when you have a change in your schedule of work activities. Normally, your SonomaWORKS caseworker will be aware of the changes to your work activity schedule and will authorize the new child care schedule in advance. However, if you change your schedule without notifying your case worker, the new child care schedule may still be approved, but it will probably delay payment to your provider. You **must** contact your worker as soon as possible when you have a schedule change or otherwise change your SonomaWORKS activity.

Although you may only be required to report most changes on a quarterly basis for your cash aid, that is not true for child care. **When SonomaWORKS is paying for your child care, you must report the following every month:**

- The number of hours you participated in work or a Welfare to Work activity
- Any changes in your work or activity schedule
- Any changes in your total household income
- If a parent of a child receiving child care moves into your home
- If another child moves into your home, including newborn children.

Failure to report these changes may result in an overpayment of child care.

Provider Information

It is the parents' responsibility to report changes that may affect their child care subsidy. However, if the parents do not report a change you may receive payments that you shouldn't get, or there may be changes in the payment amount. If you have any question about a change and how it will affect you, contact the Child Care Authorization Clerk immediately. The clerk will find out if the change has been reported and if there will be a change in what we can pay you.

Transfers to Other Agencies

State law says that families are to be moved out of welfare-related child care and into the same subsidized system used by all low-income families. Therefore, once the parent's need for child care has stabilized, we will transfer the child care payment into programs operated by 4Cs, PACE-APP, and RCCS. **The parent and the provider do not have a**

choice about when there will be a transfer or which agency will take over the payments.

When the family's child care is transferred to the new agency, we will provide our records to the new agency. The new agency will be contacting the parent to obtain current and/or additional information to continue child care payments. The parent must cooperate with the new agency and may have to meet with them before the transfer will take place.

SonomaWORKS will continue to pay for the child care while the change is being made. Both the parent and the provider will be notified in sufficient time for them to begin submitting the monthly attendance sheet to the correct agency.

This transfer will be handled so that there is no break in payments. **However, the parent must cooperate with the new agency or child care payments may be stopped.**

Families will be transferred to Stage Two agencies for one the following reasons:

- You are no longer eligible for SonomaWORKS cash aid.
- You are working at least 16 hours per week, whether or not you are still getting cash aid.
- You are in a training program at least 16 hours per week and it is expected to last for at least 4 months, whether or not you are still getting cash aid.

Child Care after Cash Aid Ends

When you are no longer eligible for SonomaWORKS, child care payments can continue for up to 2 years, even if your children are still getting cash aid. This time limit applies whether the child care is paid by SonomaWORKS, 4Cs, PACE-APP, or RCCS.

There are some different eligibility rules for child care once the parent goes off cash aid. Those rules are described in the "Eligibility" section. Generally, parents may continue to get child care subsidies as long as their children meet the age requirements and their family income does not go over the income limit. As family's income goes up, they may have to pay a Family Fee. If they are already paying a Family Fee, the fee may increase.

Once a family's child care is moved to 4Cs, PACE-APP, or RCCS, those agencies may be able to move the family into a different child care program. Normally, those programs do not have a time limit. This is why it is important for families to get their child care payments transitioned to one of these agencies.

Every family has different needs or questions when it comes to child care. Parents should contact their worker with questions. Providers should contact the Child Care Authorization Clerk.