

Childcare Fees Policy

Purpose

This policy will provide clear guidelines for families and ECMS Centre Directors to ensure that there is a transparent process in relation to the collection of fees for children accessing ECMS Early Learning Centres.

This policy details ECMS commitment to:

- the collection of fees
- an equitable and efficient fee payment process for ECMS Early Learning Centres
- the collection of outstanding fees
- supporting families experiencing hardship.

Policy Principles

ECMS is a not-for-profit community organisation committed to supporting all families to access quality early childhood education and care. Operating within our values of inclusion and respect ECMS aims to ensure our services are affordable, offer quality and value for money and remain sustainable for future children and families.

Scope

All Centre Directors and families accessing ECMS Early Learning and Care Centres.

Fees Review

ECMS will review fees on an annual basis and will inform parents as soon as practicable of the charges payable for the following calendar year.

Billing

Families will be billed on a fortnightly basis on a Thursday. Fees are to be paid 2 weeks in advance, at all times.

The payment method is for families to set up direct debit or credit card payment through Debitsuccess.

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Overdue Accounts and Late Payment Fees

Parents will be notified when their fee payments are due or in arrears.

- The Centre Director will contact families if an account is overdue. A late payment fee of \$100 will be charged if an account is overdue by 8 days, without prior arrangements
- When an account is overdue 9-15 days overdue, the family will be contacted by the Centre Director who will verbally request payment within a maximum 2-week period and this will be noted on the family's file
- If an account is outstanding for more than 15 days the family will receive an account statement calling for immediate payment of arrears. A copy of the letter will be added to the family's file
- If an account is overdue by 31 days or exceeds arrears of \$1,000 and the family has not made contact to make suitable payment arrangements, the child's place at the service will be forfeited, until the account has been settled, and the account will be forwarded to debt collection
- Under exceptional circumstances, any of the above can be waived. Decisions to waive must be made with the approval of the Centre Director, Area Manager and Finance Manager.

Payment Plans

Families experiencing genuine difficulty with payment of their fees must agree to a payment plan with their Centre Director. The payment plan should be designed to clear debts while maintaining regular payments for any ongoing early childhood education and care services, and it should be sustainable for both parties. The recommended additional payment each fortnight is 25%-50% of the regular fees paid by the family.

Payment Plans must be negotiated and agreed on the basis that ongoing fees for services will remain current and the additional payments are only to clear debts so that the arrears and late payment fees do not continue to increase.

The Centre Director will write the payment plan and terms of the agreement into a letter, with the family and Centre Director signing two copies. One copy will be kept on the family file at the centre, while the other copy will be given to the family.

Dishonour Fee

If a payment to Debitsuccess is declined, a dishonour fee will be administered by Debitsuccess on each occasion for administrative purposes. Further information is available in the Direct Debit Request - Authorisation Form/terms and conditions.

Casual Bookings

The QikKids Kiosk provides families with the opportunity to book casual days (outside of their scheduled bookings).

- Families can book up to 2 weeks in advance
- Families cannot book any closer than 3 working days to the day of care
- If a casual day needs to be cancelled, families must cancel within 48 hours to the day of care, otherwise, they will be charged for the day.

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Late Collection Fees

The daily fees are based on the opening hours provided for the centre. In the event that a family is late collecting their child from the service, additional costs are incurred.

A late collection fee will be charged at \$15 for the first 5 minutes and then \$10 every 10 minutes after that. This will be imposed at the discretion of the Director.

If a family is delayed through unavoidable circumstances, they must contact the Centre staff to advise the details and when the child will be collected. If the centre has not been contacted a staff member will attempt to contact both parents and emergency contacts before calling the police.

Public Holidays

Fees are calculated on a weekly basis including public holidays. Families will be charged for public holidays at the same rate as a regular day of care.

Family Holidays and Non-attendance days

When a child does not attend the service for reasons such as illness or holidays, families will continue to be charged for services according to the child's regular booking.

Families who take extended holiday periods but wish to hold their child's place at the centre will be expected to pay the regular fees for the place at the Centre.

Absenteeism

If a child is to be absent for the day, parents are requested to telephone the service as soon as possible to inform educators. If the child is sick it is important to inform the service of the nature of the illness, symptoms and any diagnosis is helpful in containing the spread of illness. Families will be charged for services on this day.

ECMS Annual Conference Closure

ECMS believes that ongoing professional development and training is vital for our staff to remain at the forefront of their profession and continue to provide quality early childhood education and care. Each year all staff will attend the annual conference. On this day all ECMS centres are closed. Families will need to arrange alternative care for their children on this day and will be notified of the date in advance. Families will not be charged for services on this day.

Cancellation of Booking

Families are asked to provide 2 weeks written notice of the cancellation of a booking. Fees will continue to apply until a written cancellation of the booking is received. If your child does not attend the service for the any of the last two weeks, without a medical certificate, full fees will apply and you will not be eligible for Child Care Subsidy.

Fee Subsidy Entitlements

Most Australian families are entitled to the Child Care Subsidy (CCS). The level of CCS entitlements varies according to three factors.

1. Combined family income
2. Activity Test – the activity level of both parents

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3. Service Type - type of childcare service

To be eligible, families must apply for CCS online at www.humanservices.gov.au/families through myGov or phone 136 150 between 8 am and 8 pm (local time) Monday to Friday or visit a Service Centre. Families are unable to receive the Child Care Subsidy without completing this process.

ECMS and our Early Learning Centres are registered with the Department of Education as approved Childcare Subsidy Providers. ECMS services will undertake every effort to advise the Department of the hours of care provided to ensure that families receive the appropriate subsidy, however, ECMS has no influence over a family's eligibility or subsidy amount. All terms and conditions of CCS are available from the Department of Education and Department of Human Services.

Sources and Further Reading

- Belonging, Being and Becoming - The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF) 2009
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework 2016
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 Reg 73-76,
- Education and Care Services National Law 2010 Section 168 & 323
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Vic), as amended 2011
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic), as amended 2012
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)
- Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)
- A New Tax System (Family Assistance and Related Measures) Act 2000

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Contract for Payment of Fees

I/we (parents /guardians name) _____

Of, (address) _____

1. Acknowledge that the childcare service is funded by fees paid by the parents. The childcare service cannot operate without the fees paid by parents.
2. Agree to pay two weeks fees in full in advance prior to commencing at the service and to remain two weeks in advance at all times.
3. Acknowledge having received and read the attached summary of the centre's fee policy, which sets out the procedure for fee payment.
4. Agree that if our financial circumstances change and we are unable to pay the fees as agreed, we will immediately notify ECMS to discuss appropriate alternative payment arrangements.
5. Agree that if our activity and financial circumstances change and we will immediately notify Centrelink to ensure our Child Care Subsidy entitlements are up to date.
6. Agree to pay fees while the child is absent. Examples include: annual leave, public holidays, illness, closure due to unforeseen circumstances etc.
7. A late fee of \$100 will be charged to families for late payment of their account.
8. Agree to collect my child from the service prior to closing time.
9. Agree to give two weeks' written notice of when my child/children will be leaving the centre.
10. Acknowledge that Department of Education and Department of Human Services may view this information if auditing the service.
11. If my account is in arrears it may compromise my child's position at the service.

Signed _____

Print name _____

Child's name _____

Dated _____

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