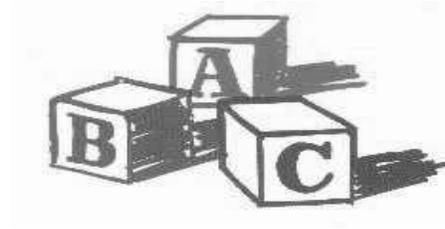


**HANDBOOK
FOR
PARENTS**



**ABC CHILD CARE PROGRAM
1-800-476-0199**

CONGRATULATIONS!

Your family is eligible to receive subsidized child care services from the ABC Child Care Program, hereafter called ABC Program. This handbook contains information that will help you understand the program and what is required of you. Please read it carefully. Direct any questions you may have to the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) Support Services Specialist (SSS) in your county or the ABC Voucher Control Center at P.O. Box 100160, Columbia, SC 29202-3160.

The ABC Program will pay all or a portion of your child care cost for children up to age 13. The amount depends upon the funding source which you are receiving. You may enroll your child(ren) with any licensed/registered child care center, group day care home, family day care home, summer camp, afterschool program and/or a relative or friend. (Clients receiving services under Child Protective Services or Foster Care may choose only licensed facilities or programs.)

The amount of funding for which you are eligible will vary according to the following:

- age of your child(ren),
- hours and weeks of care needed, and
- choice of provider.

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CHOOSING A CHILD CARE PROVIDER

When you are approved to receive subsidized child care services from the ABC Program, a list of child care providers for your county is included with the information sent to you. These providers are enrolled in the ABC Program as enhanced providers and have volunteered to meet quality standards of the ABC Program. These programs have chosen to meet higher staff training requirements, to have more staff to supervise and care for the children, to have planned activities for children and are regularly checked by an ABC Program monitor. You may select one of these providers or you may select a provider that is not on this list.

If you are a Child Protective Services client or a foster parent, you may choose only licensed facilities or programs. The following steps need to be followed as you choose a provider:

- Select a provider as soon as possible, but within 15 calendar days from the date you receive this information. If you **DO NOT** act quickly, you may lose your child care funds. If you need extra days to select the provider, please call **1-800-476-0199** to request an extension.
- Make sure your provider receives authorization to serve your child by submitting the Client/Provider Connection card to the ABC Control Center. You must sign the card before the provider submits it.
- Find out what fees you must pay. The provider may charge extra fees for activities or late pick-up.
- If you choose a licensed center, make sure that it is licensed to serve children the age of your child.

NOTE: The ABC Program will pay registration fees for each child per year, not to exceed \$100. All other fees charged by a provider are your responsibility. Ask the provider if the weekly rate they charge is higher than the maximum weekly rate the ABC Program will pay. If you select a provider whose weekly rate is higher than the ABC Program rate, **you are responsible for the difference** between the two rates.

Other questions that you may want to ask to help you choose wisely are:

- Does the provider allow unlimited access to child(ren) during normal hours of operation or whenever your child is under the provider's supervision?
- Does the provider have a schedule showing the days the facility/home will be closed so you can make other child care arrangements for those days?
- Does the provider have a daily schedule of activities and curriculum? Ask what your child will be doing while he is with the provider.
- Is the facility licensed or registered by DSS? You may also want to look for the Advocates for Better Care Certificate, which indicates this provider meets higher standards. **NOTE:** Church-based facilities are required to be licensed by DSS.

Additionally, we ask that you view the "Come, Play with Me" video available at all enrolled providers, and that you read **carefully** all letters sent to you from the ABC Program. Information in the letters may affect your child care assistance.

CHOOSING SELF-ARRANGED CHILD CARE

You may use a relative or friend who is not licensed/registered by DSS to care for your child(ren). However, if you're going to do this, you must schedule an appointment with the SSS in your county to have them explain the process to you. Then you must do the following:

- Complete a minimum health and safety inspection of the home (very simple);
- Interview the caregiver, have them sign the certification and explain the billing procedures; and
- View a videotape about quality child care.

SSS will provide the forms that must be completed and forward the necessary information to the ABC Control Center. Your caregiver must be registered in the ABC Program before they can be paid. Child care cannot begin

until the ABC Control Center authorizes your provider. If you choose self-arranged/informal care with a relative or friend the following things are important to remember:

- A certification of minimum health and safety standards of the home must be signed by you and the caregiver and approved by DSS.
- Care by relatives or friends is not checked by the DSS. You are solely responsible for checking the services provided to your child(ren).
- You are responsible for paying your part of the child care fees.
- You may transfer to another provider by calling the ABC Control Center and obtaining approval for the transfer. The ABC Control Center will give you an effective date. However, if you transfer without approval, you must pay for services at the new provider until a written authorization is obtained. A payment cannot be issued to two providers for the same week of care.
- Self-arranged care providers may care for the children of only one unrelated family, in addition to their children. If the provider you select wants to care for more than one unrelated family, they must be registered by DSS.

PAYMENT OF FEES

In the ABC Program, you are required to pay a fee toward the cost of child care. This fee is based on your family's gross monthly income and family size, and applies to each child who will receive care.

You pay the fee directly to your provider. Your fee is a part of the provider's weekly rate. If your provider charges more than the ABC Program pays, you are responsible for paying the difference between the two rates. Your provider may terminate services to you if you fail to pay the fee.

NOTE: Be sure to get and keep a receipt from your provider for fees you pay.

FEE EXEMPTIONS: If you are a Family Independence (FI) participant, or a foster parent, you are not charged a fee.

PROVIDER PAYMENTS

Your child care provider will be paid when a Service Voucher Log (SVL) is submitted to the ABC Program.

REPORTING CHANGES IN FAMILY SITUATION

You must report to the ABC Control Center all changes in gross family income, family size, address and employment/school/training within 10 calendar days after the change occurs.

CHANGING CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

You may change child care providers with advance notice and approval from the ABC Control Center. Notify the current provider and the ABC Control Center at 1-800-476-0199. You must get approval from the ABC Control Center, and your new provider must receive written authorization from the ABC Control Center before you change providers. If you transfer without approval, you are responsible for the full cost of the service until a written authorization is obtained.

Remember: Only one provider will be paid for each week of service.

PARENT COMPLAINT PROCESS

Complaints, suggestions or concerns about your ABC Program provider arrangements should be made by calling 1-800-763-ABCD.

FAIR HEARING

Any applicant or client adversely affected by a child care action may request a fair hearing. This can be done by writing to SCDSS, Individual and Provider Rights, P.O. Box 1520, Columbia, SC 29205-1520. Adverse actions may include, but not be limited to, denial of benefits. You must request, in writing, a fair hearing within 30 days of notification of any adverse action.

REDETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility must be redetermined at least once a year, and more often if your income increases, or there is a change in family size, employment, school or training status. You are to notify DSS Supportive Services or the ABC Control Center of any changes. They will redetermine eligibility. Also, eight weeks before services are to end, you will be sent a letter to remind you that services will end. If funds are available, you may be allowed to re-apply for child care services. If you are eligible for continued funding, the letter will explain the procedures necessary to re-apply. If you are not eligible for continued funding, the letter will tell you when services will end.

Some funding sources allow clients to receive child care longer than others. If you are eligible to receive continued child care under any of these funding sources, you will be informed and eligibility will be redetermined.

ABSENCES

When you are authorized to receive child care, it is assumed you need this service and will use it on a daily basis. Your child may be absent when he is sick, but if you exceed the number of days allowed without notifying the ABC Control Center, your child may be terminated from the program. Allowed absences are based on the number of weeks authorized:

52 weeks of care = 31 days absence
50 weeks of care = 30 days absence
38 weeks of care = 23 days absence
33 weeks of care = 20 days absence
12 weeks of care = 7 days absence

You must follow the attendance policies in using child care services. Failure to comply could result in services being terminated. If you are terminated for excessive absences and you have documentation that may excuse the absences, you have until the effective termination date to submit the information for review.

Providers are not allowed to bill for children after a child has been absent for 10 consecutive days. Services may be terminated for excessive absences.

REASON FOR TERMINATION OF CHILD CARE

Your child care services will be terminated if:

- One or both parents are no longer employed; or
- One or both parents are no longer attending a training or educational program; or
- Your family income exceeds the income guidelines for your family size; or
- Your child(ren) no longer live(s) with you; or
- Your child(ren) no longer need(s) child care; or
- Your child(ren) exceeded allowed absences; or
- You submit fraudulent information; or you abused the system.

In accordance with Title VI Section 601 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title V Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Department of Health and Human Services will administer its programs in such a manner that no person shall solely by reason of his race, color, national origin or qualified handicap, be excluded from participating in, be denied the benefit of or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity administered by the Agency. For more information contact the ABC Control Center at 1-800-476-0199.