

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES FEE POLICY

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this policy is to ensure all families and educators are aware of their rights and responsibilities regarding the payment and collection of fees for Windermere Early Childhood Education and Care Services (ECECS).

Scope

This policy applies to all families using the services of Windermere Family Day Care, In Home Care and Early Learning Centre and all home based educators.

Definitions

The Service:

Windermere's Early Childhood Education and Care Services.

Home Based Care:

The term used to describe Windermere's family day care and in home care programs.

Family Day Care:

A commonwealth government funded program that provides education and care services in the homes of approved and registered educators.

In Home Care:

A commonwealth government funded program that provides education and care services in a family home by an approved and registered educator.

Centre Based Care:

A commonwealth government funded program that provides education and care services from an early learning centre.

Early Start Kindergarten:

A funded program that enables three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection to attend a kindergarten program that is planned and delivered by an early childhood teacher for a specific number of hours.

Fees:

A charge for a place within a program at the Service.

Health Care Card:

A commonwealth government entitlement providing concessions for low-income earners and other eligible people.

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS):

A state government subsidy paid directly to the funded service to enable eligible families to attend a funded kindergarten program or funded three-year-old place at no cost (or minimal cost) to promote participation.

Department of Education and Training (DET):

This state government department supports the development, health and wellbeing of babies and young children through services, legislation and care.

Policy Statement

WINDERMERE IS COMMITTED TO ENSURING ITS FEES ARE AFFORDABLE AND THAT ALL FAMILIES HAVE ACCESS TO ANY SUBSIDIES THAT ARE AVAILABLE TO REDUCE THESE FEES. RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES (CONTAINED WITHIN THIS POLICY DOCUMENT) HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED TO ENSURE PAYMENT AND COLLECTION OF FEES OCCURS IN A TIMELY FASHION, SUPPORTING WINDERMERE TO PLAN AND OPERATE HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION AND CARE FOR CHILDREN.

Procedures - General

1. Child Care Benefit (CCB) is a payment made by the commonwealth government to approved service providers to assist families by reducing the cost of quality child care. To register for CCB you need to contact the Family Assistance Office on 136 150. Once approved, you must provide Windermere with all relevant information to claim CCB on your behalf. Families can also apply with the Family Assistance Office for Child Care Rebate (CCR) which provides you with a rebate of 50% of your out of pocket expenses, up to a capped amount per year. Families may receive this rebate directly or nominate Windermere to receive it so that fortnightly child care fees are further reduced. Families are responsible for updating their information with the Family Assistance Office to ensure it is always current and correct.
2. All families are required to sign their children in and out of care on a daily basis. This record of attendance and/or absence days is then sent to the Family Assistance Office for CCR and CCB payments. Attendance records are legal documents so parents/guardians or authorised persons must ensure the information they provide on the records is true and correct by providing a signature to verify the details provided.
3. The core hours of operation for home based care are 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday. All education and care provided between these hours is referred to as standard care and all education and care provided between 6pm and 8am on weekdays and all day on weekends is referred to as non-standard care. provided between these hours is referred to as standard care and all education and care provided between 6pm and 8am on weekdays and all day on weekends is referred to as non-standard care.
4. The hours of operation for centre based care are 7.30am to 6pm, Monday to Friday.

Procedures – Fees and Charges

1. Windermere sets and reviews fees and charges for families annually and gives families four weeks' notice of any changes. A current fee schedule is provided to all families upon enrolment and/or upon request.

Educators

1. Windermere reviews home based educator payments, fees and charges annually. Educators are provided with an opportunity to negotiate their annual payment rate and will be provided with four weeks' notice of any change in educator fees and charges.
2. Family day care educators must purchase an annual HubWorks licence at their own expense. Windermere will purchase in advance for all educators for the 2015-16 financial year with repayments deducted from fortnightly educator payments. Educators who cease operation before the annual licence fee is repaid will have any outstanding monies deducted from their final payment.

Procedures – Fees and Charges (continued)

Absences

1. Absences are charged at the normal rate and CCB is paid for 42 allowable absences, across all services per financial year (which includes public holidays, illness, curriculum day, etc). Absences above this number must be accompanied by the appropriate documentation, such as a medical certificate, for CCB to be paid.
2. Families are not entitled to receive CCB when their child's care begins or ceases on an absence. This means a child must be in care on the first day of booked care and the last day of booked care (including the notice period) otherwise full fee for the days the child is not in care will be required from the parent/guardian.
3. CCB cannot be claimed for absences taken for more than six consecutive weeks.
4. Home-based care educators that would normally provide food for the child/ren are entitled to be paid the fee for food if less than 24 hours' notice of an absence is provided, as food would already have been purchased and possibly prepared in advance.

Late Fees

1. Windermere is entitled to charge families a late fee of \$1 per minute for children who are not collected by the booked pick-up time (home based care) or closure of the centre (centre based care). This fee does not attract CCB or CCR and must be paid in full by the parents/guardians

Home Based Care

1. Families using home based care will be charged based on the educator. All families with a particular educator will be charged the same rate but the rate charged between education and care with one educator may differ to the rate charged with another educator.
2. Fees are charged on booked hours. Additional fees are charged for extra care provided outside of the booked hours.
3. Full fees are payable on all absences, including public holidays, to secure the education and care placement. Home based educators are not required to hold a place for families who do not pay the full absence fees. Note: Home based educators are also not required to provide care on public holidays however if they do, fees will be charged at the public holiday rate.
4. Where an educator is unavailable to provide care, there will be no charge to families.
5. One week's notice is required for all cancellations of permanent bookings.

Centre Based Care

1. All families are charged at the same rate.
2. Fees charged are based on the booked days with additional fees charged for extra care provided outside of the booked days.
3. Full fees are payable on all absences, including public holidays, to ensure families retain their education and care placement. Centre based care is open on some public holidays that align with Monash University's requirements (refer to the family handbook for dates).
4. All fees are payable two weeks in advance and families must pay the two weeks advance upon enrolment in the service. Fees are payable upon receipt of the first fee statement and payment is due with seven days. Windermere is not required to hold a place for families who do not pay or maintain their fees two weeks in advance.
5. With the exception of public holidays, when centre based care closes voluntarily (such as over the Christmas/New Year period) there will be no charge to families.
6. One week's notice is required for all cancellations of permanent bookings.

Procedures – Fee payment

1. Families who apply for and are eligible for CCB and/or CCR (and have Windermere nominated to receive these payments) are only required to pay the fee not covered by the relevant subsidy. This is commonly referred to as the 'gap' fee.

Educators

1. Home based educators will receive payment from Windermere on a fortnightly basis, upon receipt and processing of compliant child attendance records. Family day care educators will be paid in full in accordance with their agreed annual payment rate. In home care educators will be paid the relevant subsidy amounts, with families paying the gap fee directly to the educator.

Home Based Care

1. Payment for family day care is to be made directly through HubWorks. Families will be provided with login details upon enrolment. If this is not a suitable option for families, they may speak with the Team Leader Quality Practice and Outcomes to make alternative arrangements. Payment is required within seven days of issuing an invoice.
2. Families using in home care will be issued with a payment advice within seven days of the allocated processing fortnight ending. These payment advices are provided to educators and families on a fortnightly basis. Payment is required within seven days of issuing this advice.
3. Payment for in home care is to be made directly to the educator on behalf of Windermere. The preferred payment method is to be discussed and agreed directly between the parent/guardian and the educator.
4. Receipts will be issued by Windermere for all fees and charges paid and are to show a true and accurate record of the actual amount charged and paid. Receipts for in home care will be provided by the educator on behalf of Windermere.

Centre Based Care

1. Families using centre based care will be invoiced in advance and provided with a fortnightly statement. Payment is required within seven days of issuing this statement.
2. Payment for centre based care is to be made directly to the centre through the Ezy Debit System. If this is not a suitable option for families, they may speak with the Team Leader Early Learning to make alternative arrangements.

Overdue Payments and Debts

1. Where fees are not paid within seven days of an invoice/payment advice being issued they are classed as overdue. The following outlines the process for overdue payments:
 - After one week: Families will be notified in writing and requested to pay all overdue fees within a seven day period.
 - After two weeks: Families will be notified in writing and/or by telephone to pay all overdue fees; and advised that care will cease if payment is not made immediately.
 - After three weeks: If no contact has been made with Windermere to make payment or discuss payment options, care will cease immediately.
 - If no payment has been received after thirty days Windermere may take legal action through a debt collection service to recover unpaid fees.
2. Families who have outstanding and unpaid fees will not be offered any other care within Windermere's Education and Care Services until all monies are paid in full.

Procedures – Financial Hardship

1. For families experiencing financial hardship, there are options available that may assist with the cost of education and care services. To request options for financial assistance, or to discuss payment options for overdue accounts, speak with the Team Leader Early or Team Leader Quality Practice and Outcomes. Options include:
 - Special CCB - This is provided by the commonwealth government and enables eligible families to access up to 13 weeks of paid child care. Eligibility criteria applies.
 - KFS – This is provided by DET and enables children to attend four year old kindergarten free of charge or at minimal cost. Eligibility guidelines apply and supporting documentation is required.
 - Early Start Kindergarten – This is provided by the DET and enables three year old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and those known to Child Protection to attend a funded early childhood program that is planned and delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher free of charge.
2. Some families may also be eligible for concessions as listed in the Fees – Exceptional Circumstances Policy (refer to policy for further information).

Relevant Legislation/Standards

- National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care Services including:
 - Education and Care Services National Law 2011
 - Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
- Family Assistance Law
- QIC Core Standards

Related Policies & Links

- Windermere’s Policy and Procedure Manual:
 - Section 4 Financial Management, Fees Policy
- ECECS Policy and Procedure Manual:
 - EC 4.02 Early Childhood Education and Care Services Fees – Exceptional Circumstances Policy
 - EC 7.04 Early Childhood Education and Care Services Home Based Care Attendance Record Policy