



Fees Policy

AIM

To enable our service to provide high quality early education and care for children in our community we need to ensure that we remain financially viable. Payment of fees within our trading terms allows us to plan with certainty. We have a commitment to ensuring our fees are as affordable as possible and that all families have access to any subsidies that are available to them. Our service will advocate with governing bodies for the right of all children to access early education and care no matter their families financial situation.

This policy aims to provide clear guidelines for:

- Ensuring all families are aware of their responsibility in relation to payment of fees
- Keeping fee increases to a minimum.
- Following all statutory & legislative requirements to ensure our continued access to government funding.
- Providing a fair and manageable system for the management of late fee payments and in assisting families experiencing financial hardship with payment options.
- Maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of parents/guardians.

LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS/SOURCES

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Child Care Service Handbook (2012 – 2013)

Incorporation Requirements

Community Childcare Co-operative

IMPLEMENTATION

FEE SCHEDULE

At all times MCEEC will strive to ensure the service remains financially viable and able to meet its obligations as they fall due. We will review fees twice annually in line with CPI and market conditions.

DISCLOSURE OF PERSONAL INFORMATION

We will only disclose any personal information we collect about children and/or families to DEEWR/The Family Assistance office (FAO)/The Department of Education and other Agencies where the disclosure is legally required. However, we reserve the right to pass on a Families name, contact details and details of any outstanding monies owing to MCEEC to a collection agency for the purpose of recouping unpaid amounts owing.

PAYMENT OF FEES

Fees are charged for each enrolled day, except for Public Holidays. Since the fee level calculation is based on averages, fees must be paid even if the child is away sick, on holidays, or a child is excluded due to non-immunisation. Only the Centre's annual closure period is exempt from fee payment. At Maryland Care & Early Education Centre we require all fees to be paid a minimum of **one week in advance** at all times (this includes staff members and Board members).

Payment of fees may be made by direct deposit into the MCEEC bank account, by cheque, through our Ezi debit system or by cash. Please note MCEEC will not be held responsible for any cash payments which do not appear for processing under any circumstances. Fees payments should be made on a weekly or fortnightly basis. To pay monthly please speak to the Business Manager.

Receipts for all fee payments will be placed in the communication pocket clearly identified with the child's family name or sent directly to families via email.

PROCEDURES FOR FEES IN ARREARS

If you are experiencing any problems with payment of your account please discuss this matter with the Business Manager prior to your account going into arrears. Whilst we will try and help wherever possible we are unable to carry any long term debts.

The process for the collection of overdue accounts will commence when families accounts are two weeks in arrears. The process will be as follows:

Step 1. A courtesy reminder via phone, letter or email will be made to the account holder advising that they have unpaid fees that are due for payment immediately. MCEEC will advise that payment of these outstanding fees should be finalised by the account holder within 7 days from the date of the letter or email.

If the account holder is unable to meet the expected payment date they should contact the Business Manager to advise of their changed circumstances. The Business Manager will use their discretion to negotiate and agree a payment plan with the account holder to ensure the account is returned to within MCEEC agreed trading terms within a defined period. The agreed plan will be confirmed with the account holder in writing.

Where an account holder does not make an agreed payment within the agreed or advised timelines the collection process will proceed to the next step.

Step 2. If the outstanding amount has not been finalised within a 7 day period a second reminder, in writing, will be sent to the account holder via email and/or letter. The second letter will advise the amount outstanding and the final date for payment. Where payment in full is not received by the advised date the debt collection process will proceed to the final stage of collection.

Step 3. This is the final request for payment. A final request for payment will be made in writing and be sent via email or letter requesting immediate payment of amounts in arrears. The letter will advise that failure to pay by the due date will result in their offer of childcare by MCEEC being withdrawn and effective from the first day of care after the due date.

Step 4. Where an account remains unpaid after the final demand a letter will be sent to the account holder advising them that their offer of care has been withdrawn effective immediately. After 14 days the outstanding account will be forwarded to a Debt Recovery organisation for finalisation. The account holder will be responsible for any costs incurred in recovering any outstanding amounts

Special Circumstances:- Where an account holder advises at any stage of the process that they are unable to pay their account due to financial hardship, the entire process is revised to the following:- confirmation of this conversation with the account holder is confirmed in writing and the process proceeds directly to Step 4.

ASSISTANCE WITH CHILD CARE COSTS

CHILD CARE BENEFIT (CCB)

What is Child Care Benefit? Child Care Benefit is a payment from the Australian Government that helps you with the cost of your child care.

Who can get Child Care Benefit? You can get Child Care Benefit if you are a parent, foster parent or grandparent with a child in your care who is attending child care services approved by, or registered with, the Government.

You can get Child Care Benefit if:

- You have a child in your care who meets the immunisation requirements or has been granted an exemption
- You and/or your partner meet residency requirements or have an exemption.
- Your child attends approved or registered care and you are liable to pay for the cost of your child care
- You meet the income test

Please note: If your employer contributes towards some or all of your child care costs through salary sacrificing or salary packaging, you will need to determine who has the liability for the costs. The issue of liability depends on who is obligated to pay for the child care fees.

How can I get Child Care Benefit?

You can claim Child Care Benefit by completing and lodging a claim form at any Family Assistance Office, located at Centrelink Customer Service Centres and Medicare Australia shopfronts or by using online services.

Note: You need to claim for Child Care Benefit even if you are assessed at the zero rate so that you can also receive your Child Care Rebate.

If you receive Family Tax Benefit as a fortnightly payment, you can lodge a claim for Child Care Benefit by calling 136 150.

What if my child is absent from child care?

Child Care Benefit can be paid in some situations if you are charged for child care when your child is absent. Child Care Benefit is paid for up to 42 absences for each child per financial year across all approved child care services except Occasional Care. These absence days can be taken for any reason with no evidence required. Please talk to your child care provider regarding the absence policy detail.

Child Care Benefit is also paid for additional absences above the 42 days for certain reasons. There is no limit on these days but supporting documentation may be required. Please talk to your child care provider regarding the additional absence policy detail and any supporting document requirements.

CHILD CARE REBATE (CCR)

What is the Child Care Rebate? The Child Care Rebate helps working families with the cost of child care. The Child Care Rebate covers 50 per cent of out-of-pocket child care expenses for approved child care up to the maximum legislated amount per year per child in approved care.

Can I get the Child Care Rebate?

There are certain requirements you must meet to get the Child Care Rebate.

You must have:

- Used approved child care during the year;
- Been eligible for Child Care Benefit (entitled at a rate of zero or more);
- Passed the work, training, study test at some time during the week the approved care was provided.
- Your child's immunisations are up to date

Note: There is no income test for the Child Care Rebate. If you are eligible for Child Care Benefit, but your Child Care Benefit entitlement is zero due to income, you may still be eligible for the Child Care Rebate.

How can I get paid?

You have the option to receive your Child Care Rebate paid either direct to service, direct to customer, quarterly or annually. Payment of Child Care Rebate is based on the frequency of child care attendance data received from your Child Care Service. When you choose a payment option, this option will be applied for the entire financial year.

'Direct to Service':

You can choose to have Child Care Rebate automatically sent to your Approved Child Care Service. The Child Care Service will reduce your account by the amount of the Child Care Rebate entitlement.

'Direct to Customer':

Your Child Care Rebate entitlement will be credited to your bank account each time your Approved Child Care Service lodges child care attendance details.

If you want to receive your Child Care Rebate as a 'Direct to Service' or 'Direct to Customer' payment, you must claim Child Care Benefit as reduced fees, even if you are eligible for Child Care Benefit but your entitlement is zero due to income.

Note: If you choose 'Direct to Service' or 'Direct to Customer' and you are in receipt of Child Care Benefit at a legislative rate greater than zero, you will have 15% of your Child Care Rebate withheld to reduce your chances of a reconciliation debt. The balance of those funds withheld will be reconciled at the end of financial year (when your tax returns have been lodged and all your child care attendance information has been received). Any outstanding amounts will be paid as a direct payment to your bank account.

LATE FEE

Our Centre is licensed to operate from 7.30am-5.45pm. Parents should arrive before this time to ensure they have collected their child and left the centre by 5.45pm. Any parent who has not collected their child by 5.45pm will be required to pay a late fee. This fee is necessary to cover the cost of overtime paid to staff when they are required to keep the centre open after 5.45pm. An initial fee of \$40.00 will be charged and an additional \$1.00 per minute thereafter until your child is collected. Should you wish to discuss your child's day with staff, please ensure that you arrive at

least 10 minutes prior to the end of your child's care. Parents must phone the Centre if you are going to be late.

HOLIDAYS, OCCASIONAL ABSENCES, SICK DAYS

When children are absent from the Centre for any reason, families are still required to pay fees. Some of the reasons for children being absent include illness, holidays and exclusion from the Centre due to an infectious disease. If your child will be away from the Centre due to illness, please advise us of this by that morning at the latest and also the nature of the illness affecting the child.

Please also notify the Centre by 9.00 am on any day your child takes an occasional absence. If not attending the Centre due to taking holidays please advise us before you go. In cases where your child has been absent due to an infectious disease, a medical certificate is required stating that your child is healthy and able to return to childcare. This is a government requirement.

BUY/SELL SYSTEM

MCEEC has a system that has been designed to offer parents some flexibility in the use of their child care. If families have planned holidays away from the Centre, there is an option to sell your days during this period to other families attending the centre who require casual care. This is the only way days can be sold or bought. Parents are not permitted to swap days amongst themselves.

The buying and selling of day's system is only applicable to planned leave. Buying and selling of days does not operate for sick days or occasional absences. All efforts will be made to process applications and confirm to families the outcome as quickly as possible. We are not able to offer any guarantee's on being able to sell days or provide buy days.

PROCEDURE FOR BUY/SELL SYSTEM

- A buy/sell Request Form is available online from our website and also onsite from the sign in desk in the foyer. You should record on the form the name of your children and the dates they will be absent from the Centre, or the dates you would like purchase. Once the form is completed add your signature and place it in our Fee Box for processing. We require a minimum of two-week's notice to sell days. Where there is more than one family selling the same day, days will be sold on a first in first out basis.
- Parents will be informed via email on whether they were successful in selling their day.
- If you have requested a day be sold but your circumstances have since changed you should complete another form advising that the sale day has been withdrawn. You may withdraw your day from sale up until the morning of that day by phonecall providing the day has not already been sold.
- For absences of more than 30 days please ask the nominated supervisor for advice on how to proceed with selling your days.

SECURITY DEPOSITS

At Maryland Care & Early Education Centre we require the payment of a security deposit to secure your enrolment. The security deposit is calculated on the full daily fee amount without any childcare benefit deducted.

The security deposit amount increases when the child increases his/her days and/or when the daily fees increase. Enrolled families will need to "top up" their security deposit accordingly, before commencement of any extra days. (Consultation with the Business Manager is required if this cannot occur).

The security deposit is held by MCEEC until the child is withdrawn from the service.

The security deposit will then be refunded on the following conditions:

- At least two weeks' notice in writing has been given by the family/carer of their intention to withdraw their child from our service. This includes children leaving the service to attend primary school the following year.
- Security deposits belonging to families who have left with outstanding debts to the service will be held until the debt is finalised. Any legal or collection fees charged to the service in pursuance of this debt will be deducted from the security deposit prior to refunding the remaining balance.
- Parents will need to pay full fees if their child is absent when finalising the account, or the service will hold the amount owing from the security deposit.

Note: If your child did not attend on their starting date or prior to the two weeks period you will also not receive your CCB/CCR and you will be charged full fees up until the last day you attended the service.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS/CENTRE CLOSURE

Fees will not be charged for public holidays or during the Christmas and New Year closure period which is for a period of no more than 3 weeks each year.

WITHDRAWAL FROM THE CENTRE

Parents need to provide two weeks' notice of withdrawal from the service in writing and complete an 'exiting family feedback form'.

REVIEW

This policy is created in consultation with staff and families attending the service. This policy will be reviewed annually. The policy is available in other languages upon request.

Reviewed: June 2016

Next review: June 2017