



Tennessee Department of Children's Services

Protocol for Childcare Assistance Referral and Authorization

Supplemental to DCS Policy: [31.17, Childcare Assistance](#)

The Department of Children's Services (DCS) partners with the Department of Human Services (DHS) to offer childcare assistance to custodial, non-custodial, and adopted children who qualify. Qualifying children must meet the eligibility criteria, and the childcare provider must participate in the DHS Childcare Certificate program.

A. Custodial Children/Youth

1. Eligibility Criteria and Requirements for Childcare Assistance:

To qualify for childcare assistance, the below criteria must be met.

- a) The child is in the legal custody of DCS.
- b) The child is between the age of 6 weeks -13 years old for childcare services.
- c) Children ages 13-17 years old are eligible for childcare services if they are physically or mentally incapable of self-care.
- d) Custodial children/youth in a family-like placement setting (i.e. foster home, kinship home, provider foster home, or trial home visit placement) are eligible to receive financial assistance for summer camp programs.

2. Verification for Childcare Assistance:

Requests for childcare assistance must be validated by supporting documentation. Acceptable forms of verification are outlined below:

- a) Eligible children must have an open DCS case in the electronic monitoring system.

3. Applying for Childcare Assistance:

Requests for childcare assistance must be validated by supporting documentation. The process for applying for childcare assistance, the requirements, and acceptable forms of verification are outlined below.

- a) The custodial caseworker must submit a completed application to the Department of Human Services (DHS) Childcare Assistance Program. The application must list a childcare provider that accepts DHS vouchers.

- ◆ Applications may be submitted through the following link: [OneDHS - Child Care Referral | DHS - Service Portal](#).

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b) The custodial caseworker will receive an email communication from DHS after submitting the childcare assistance application and must respond back by providing DHS the following form (not doing so will result in the application being denied):

◆ [CS-0556-1, Custodial Childcare Assistance Referral and Authorization](#)

c) The DHS Childcare Specialist will send the approved certificate to the childcare agency; however, the DCS staff member is responsible for notifying the child/youth's caregiver of the approval for childcare.

d) Children/youth may attend summer camp utilizing a childcare voucher. This may include multiple summer camps or multiple weeks at a summer camp, provided the costs do not exceed \$1800.00 per fiscal year (beginning July 1st of the present year to June 30th of the following year).

◆ If the summer camp accepts DHS vouchers, the voucher will be utilized prior to applying for alternate funding.

◆ If applying to a camp that does not accept DHS vouchers, the custodial worker will need to complete a Case Service Request (CSR). The CSR must include the following information:

- Name of the camp.
- Dates for attendance.
- Location of the camp.
- The cost of the camp.
- The camp's preferred payment method.

e) All custodial children/youth under the age of three (3) are referred to the Tennessee Early Intervention System (TEIS) upon entry into foster care. If the child/youth qualifies for services that include childcare, the Child and Family Team would determine how to incorporate recommendations for services for that child/youth.

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4. Redeterminations and Terminations of Childcare Services

- a) Redeterminations and terminations are submitted by completing the applicable steps listed in section 3 of this section and submitting [CS-0556-1, Custodial Childcare Assistance Referral and Authorization](#).
- b) If the redetermination for childcare services is not completed at least 15 (fifteen) days prior to the need for redetermination, the services will cease.
- c) If the termination date is known at the time of the initial application and is included on the initial referral, an additional document to terminate services is not needed.
- d) If a custodial child/youth receiving childcare services exits foster care, it is not necessary to complete a termination. Any foster child is eligible for the entire 12 (twelve) month period as long as they were in foster care at the time the voucher began.

B. Non-Custodial Children/Youth

1. Eligibility Criteria and Requirements for Childcare Assistance:

To qualify for childcare assistance, the below criteria must be met.

- a) The child is receiving non-custodial services from DCS and has an open non-custodial case (i.e. Child Protective Services, Family Support Services, Family Crisis Intervention Program, etc.) when the request for childcare assistance is made.
- b) The child is between the age of 6 weeks -13 years old for childcare services. Children ages 13-17 years old may be eligible for childcare services if they are physically or mentally incapable of self-care.
- c) DCS Regional Fiscal Director/designee has approved childcare payments for up to three (3) months in efforts to eliminate immediate concerns to child's safety, permanency or well-being.

2. Verification for Childcare Assistance:

Requests for childcare assistance must be validated by supporting documentation. Acceptable forms of verification are outlined below:

- a) Eligible children must have an open DCS case in the Electronic Record System.

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3. Applying for Childcare Assistance:

Requests for childcare assistance must be validated by supporting documentation. The process for applying for childcare assistance, the requirements, and acceptable forms of verification are outlined below.

- a) The non-custodial caseworker will assist the family in obtaining childcare to address immediate childcare needs that otherwise may result in concerns related to the child's safety, permanency, and/or well-being.
- b) The non-custodial case must be open when the childcare assistance referral is made and approved but does not have to remain open for the duration of the childcare services.
- c) The non-custodial caseworker must submit a completed application to the Department of Human Services (DHS) Childcare Assistance Program. The application must list a childcare provider that accepts DHS vouchers.
 - ◆ Applications may be submitted through the following link: [OneDHS - Child Care Referral | DHS - Service Portal](#).
- d) The non-custodial caseworker will receive an email communication from DHS after submitting the childcare assistance application and must respond back by providing DHS the following form (not doing so will result in the application being denied):
 - ◆ [CS-0556-2, Non-Custodial Childcare Assistance Referral and Authorization](#)
- e) The DHS Childcare Specialist will send the approved certificate to the childcare agency; however, the DCS staff member is responsible for notifying the child/youth's caregiver of the approval for childcare.
- f) The non-custodial caseworker may assist the child/youth's family with applying for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) through DHS when ongoing childcare needs exceed the time or amount that is paid for by DCS.
- g) The non-custodial caseworker may refer families to the [Tennessee Child Care Resource & Referral Network \(CCR&R\)](#).

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- ◆ The CCR&R Network provides information on childcare providers in the family's area, answers to frequently asked questions, and supplies a list that reflects the needs of the child/youth and family.
 - ◆ The CCR&R Network may also assist non-custodial caseworkers in identifying childcare provider resources in their area.
- h) If the referred child/youth is under the age of three (3) and developmentally delayed or handicapped and the disability is supported by a physician's diagnosis, then the non-custodial worker should take the following steps in securing childcare services for the child/youth:
- ◆ A referral to Tennessee's Early Intervention System (TEIS) is completed utilizing [CS-0811, Tennessee Early Intervention System Referral](#).
 - ◆ For services available to a child/youth between the ages of birth through three (3) years of age who have delays, go to <https://www.tn.gov/disability-and-aging/disability-aging-programs/teis.html>. Services may include the following:
 - Family participation in community activities.
 - Working with families on strengthening their ability to handle the child/youth's disability.
 - Family participation in child development activities; and
 - A referral to supportive services.
- i) Should the above steps not provide the necessary services or support, the non-custodial caseworker can make a referral for the Child Care Certificate Program.
- j) The inability to have a child placed in TEIS or a specialized childcare facility should not prohibit the non-custodial worker from seeking a Child Care Certificate to address the immediate childcare need while TEIS or other specialized childcare is being sought.
4. Redeterminations and Terminations of Childcare Services:
- a) Redeterminations and terminations are submitted by completing the applicable steps listed in section 3 of this section and submitting [CS-0556-2, Non-Custodial Childcare Assistance Referral and Authorization](#).

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- b) If the redetermination for childcare services is not completed at least 15 (fifteen) days prior to the need for redetermination, the services will cease.
- c) If the termination date is known at the time of the initial application and is included on the initial referral, an additional document to terminate services is not needed.

C. Adopted Children/Youth

1. Eligibility Criteria and Requirements for Childcare Assistance:

To qualify for childcare assistance, the below criteria must be met.

- a) The child must be adopted from TN DCS foster care in his/her most recent adoption.
- b) The child has a valid deferred or active adoption assistance agreement in effect.
- c) The child is between ages 0 -12 years old.
- d) Adoptive parents must apply for childcare assistance, utilizing DCS form [CS-4231, Application, Referral and Authorization for Adoption Childcare Assistance](#)
- e) DCS form [CS-4231, Application, Referral and Authorization for Adoption Childcare Assistance](#) must be accompanied by supporting documentation to validate the reason for the request.
- f) The applicant must be a party to the deferred or active adoption assistance agreement.

2. Verification for Childcare Assistance:

- a) Eligible children must have a deferred or active subsidy record in the Electronic Record System. A copy of the adoption assistance agreement must be uploaded to his/her subsidy record.
- b) A copy of each child's birth certificate and social security card in the adoptive name is required unless the adoption has been finalized for less than nine (9) months. Exceptions to this requirement may be considered in extenuating circumstances and on a case-by-case basis.

3. Applying for Childcare Assistance:

When applying for Childcare Assistance, adoptive families must complete and submit the childcare assistance referral, along with the required verification, and send it to DCS Childcare

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Assistance via email, regular mail, or fax (email is the preferred method of submission as this will allow requests to be processed more quickly):

Email: EI-DCS.AdoptionChildcare@tn.gov

Regular Mail: DCS, Adoption Childcare Assistance, 315 Deaderick Street, 9th Floor, UBS Tower,
Nashville, TN
37243

Fax: 615-532-5723 Attn: Adoption Childcare Assistance

a) Processing Referrals for Childcare Assistance Prior to Adoption Finalization (Pre-Finalization)

- ◆ Initial applications submitted during pre-finalization for new applicants (foster/adoptive families who are NOT currently participating or been approved for childcare assistance through DCS) will be processed within 30 (thirty) days from the date the referral is submitted to Central Office Childcare Assistance.
- ◆ The DCS Permanency Specialist and/or Contract Provider representative will assist the family with gathering information and applying for the program.
- ◆ Applications and supporting documentation should be submitted to the EI-DCS.AdoptionChildcare@tn.gov inbox.
- ◆ Pre-finalization approval will be granted if the following is true:
 - The childcare provider is a participant in the DHS Childcare Certificate program.
 - The child has an approved deferred or active subsidy record in TFACTS.
 - A completed [CS-4231, Application, Referral and Authorization for Adoption Childcare Assistance](#) and the applicable supporting verification are uploaded in the child/youth's approved Electronic Record System subsidy record to include a signed adoption assistance agreement.
- ◆ Once the adoption is finalized, the adoptive parent is responsible for notifying the DCS Childcare Assistance Specialists, and the referral will receive final approval and be sent to DHS for processing.

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- ◆ DHS notifies the DCS Childcare Assistance program if additional information is needed but will otherwise process the Childcare Assistance referral to certify the family for Childcare Assistance.
- ◆ DHS sends the certificate to the Childcare provider and the DCS Childcare Assistance Specialist once the adoptive family has been certified for childcare assistance.
- ◆ The DCS Childcare Assistance Specialist notifies the adoptive family of approval.
- ◆ The certification is valid for 24 (twenty-four) months from the date of approval.
- ◆ If the adoption has not occurred within 90 (ninety) days from the pre-finalization approval, the application will be denied, and a new application to include supporting documentation will be required.

b) Processing Referrals for Childcare Assistance Post Adoption Finalization

- ◆ Initial applications submitted post-finalization will be reviewed and processed as they are received.
- ◆ The Childcare Assistance Specialist/Approver reviews each referral to ensure it is completed accurately and sends it to DHS for processing.
- ◆ DHS notifies the DCS Childcare Assistance program if additional information is needed but will otherwise process the Childcare Authorization to certify the family for the Childcare Certificate program.
- ◆ DHS sends the certificate to the Childcare provider and the DCS Childcare Assistance Specialist.
- ◆ The DCS Childcare Assistance Specialist notifies the adoptive family of approval.
- ◆ The certification is valid for 24 (twenty-four) months from the date of approval.
- ◆ If a completed application has not been received within 90 (ninety) days from submission, the application will be denied, and a new application to include supporting documentation will be required.

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4. Redeterminations of Childcare Services:

- a) Adoptive parents must reapply and be determined eligible for continued services through a recertification process to qualify for assistance beyond the certification period.
- b) Recertification for childcare assistance is necessary in the following circumstances:
 - ◆ To qualify for assistance beyond the expiration date or prior approved authorizations;
 - ◆ To change the childcare provider; or
 - ◆ To change the childcare service type.
- c) The recertification cycle varies based on the type of Childcare Assistance used to determine the child/youth eligible for the program.
 - ◆ Custodial Childcare Assistance is certified for a 12-month approval period.
 - ◆ Adoption Childcare Assistance is certified for a 24-month approval period.
- d) Children/youth transitioning from Custodial Childcare Assistance to Adoption Childcare Assistance will continue to remain eligible for a 12-month approval period.
- e) Once the 12-month approval period expires through custodial childcare and the adoption is finalized, the adoptive family is responsible to recertify for assistance.
- f) If the child/youth is redetermined eligible for the program through Adoption childcare assistance, the family will be certified for the 24-month approval period.
- g) The Childcare Assistance Specialists will send recertification notices in advance of the expiration date for previously approved adoption childcare authorizations.
- h) Families who do not respond to the recertification notice will be sent a notice of termination.

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- i) The same process utilized for the initial application and approval process is applied when determining eligibility for recertification.
- j) Adoptive parents are responsible for any childcare expenses incurred beyond the approval period if a subsequent approval is not granted.

5. Terminations of Childcare Assistance:

Childcare assistance is subject to termination when one of the following reasons occurs:

- a) The child/youth turns 13 (thirteen). In this circumstance, childcare assistance shall be terminated on the 1st day of the month following the child/youth's birthday.
- b) The need for childcare assistance no longer exists.
- c) The child/youth's adoption assistance agreement is terminated. In this circumstance, the child/youth shall continue to remain eligible for the childcare assistance program for the duration of the approval period unless the child turns age 13 (thirteen), or the need for childcare assistance no longer exists during the approval period.
- d) The child/youth is no longer attending the childcare program approved under the DHS Childcare Certificate program.

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The following statute applies to adopted children/youth:

TCA 36-1-205

Whoever knowingly obtains, or attempts to obtain, or aids, or abets any person to obtain, by means of willfully false statement or representation or by impersonation, or other fraudulent device, any assistance on behalf of a child or other persons pursuant to the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance to which such child or other person is not entitled or assistance greater than such child or other person is entitled, commits a Class E felony. (This means that making any statement that is not true OR failing to inform the Agency of any later change that might affect the adopted child/youth's eligibility for the current assistance may result in criminal charges.)

D. Denying the Request for Childcare Assistance

The request for childcare assistance will be denied if any of the following circumstances exist:

1. The application is incomplete.
2. The eligibility criteria are not met.
3. The childcare provider does not participate in the DHS Certificate Program.

E. Locating Childcare Providers That Accept DHS Vouchers

DHS maintains resources on their webpage to help customers locate childcare. Some of these tools will search for any childcare in the area families choose. Thus, families must filter for providers that accept childcare assistance. These resources can be found at [Find Child Care](#).

F. Childcare Cost and the DHS Voucher

1. The Department of Human Services (DHS) can only assist with childcare assistance for providers who participate in the DHS Childcare Certificate Program.
2. **In many cases, the voucher does not cover the entire cost of childcare.**
3. The voucher amount is determined by several variables including location, saturation of childcare providers in the area, population of the area, the star rating of the childcare, hours of operation, the age of the child, and if the provider is willing to accept children/youth with disabilities.

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4. DHS has a Reimbursement Rate Matrix on their webpage ([Child Care Payment Assistance](#)) that outlines the voucher amount information.
5. Ask the childcare provider the amount covered by the voucher. Childcare providers who participate in the Childcare Assistance Program are aware of the amount they receive from the voucher.
6. **The payment of any cost beyond the voucher amount is the responsibility of the parent.**

G. Documentation

Childcare designees follow the childcare assistance procedure as outlined within the Electronic Record System.

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