

SUPPORTS AVAILABLE



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PAYMENTS WHILE CHILDREN ARE IN FOSTER CARE

Most foster caregivers are volunteers and do not get paid for their services. The State of Illinois through the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), however, *reimburses* Illinois caregivers monthly when a child is under DCFS care, to account for the child's:

- “board” (food, housing, utilities, etc.);
- clothing; and
- personal allowance.

Monthly Payments

Monthly reimbursement payments are not income for foster caregivers and should not be reported as income for federal or state income tax purposes.

Licensed Foster Care Monthly Reimbursement Payments

The amount of the licensed monthly reimbursement payment is based on the age of the child and is commonly referred to as the “foster care board rate.” Any changes to the regular foster care rate must be approved by the Illinois legislature within DCFS’ annual budget. This rate is also known as the “traditional” rate.

Age of Child	Board	Clothing	Child’s Allowance	Total
0 through 11 mo.	\$352.00	\$37.00	\$12.00*	\$401.00
1 through 4 yrs.	\$354.00	\$42.00	\$13.00*	\$409.00
5 through 8 yrs.	\$357.00	\$56.00	\$14.00	\$427.00
9 through 11 yrs.	\$364.00	\$65.00	\$24.00	\$453.00
12 yrs. & Over	\$374.00	\$74.00	\$43.00	\$491.00

Effective 6/13

*The personal allowance for children aged four years and under is to be used by foster parents for incidentals (toys, rattles, etc.), which become the property of the child.

The monthly board rate can change, so caregivers can check with the Central Payment Unit (800-525-0499) for the most current rate.

Specialized Foster Care

The majority of Illinois children in DCFS care are served by families receiving the licensed foster care reimbursement rates shown above. Some children, however, have severe behavioral, emotional or medical problems that require caregivers with training and/or competencies beyond those of the traditional caregiver. In those incidences, the child’s case may be referred to an agency that has a specialized program to meet his or her identified needs. If you are interested in finding out more about fostering children with severe behavioral, emotional, or medical problems, ask your agency if their contract with DCFS includes children that match your special skills or interests.

Standard-of-Need Rate Payments for Unlicensed Relative Caregivers

Relatives who are not licensed as they take care of children in DCFS custody are reimbursed monthly, based on the standard-of-need rates. These reimbursements are less than those given to caregivers who are licensed. The standard-of-need rate varies according to the county of residence and the number of children in the home. Unlicensed caregivers are paid directly by the department even if a caregiver's home is supervised by a private agency foster care program. These rates do change so unlicensed relative caregivers should always check with the Central Payment Unit (800-525-0499) for the most current rate.

Receiving Monthly Payments

DCFS-supervised foster homes and all caregivers who receive the Standard-of-Need rate receive a monthly check mailed directly from DCFS. Private agency-supervised licensed foster families receive a monthly check from their private agency, which has received the funds from DCFS. Caregivers who receive payments directly from DCFS can sign up for electronic deposit to their bank accounts. Direct deposit information is available at the website for the Illinois Comptroller at www.ioc.state.il.us. Some agencies may also do direct deposit for their foster care payments.

How Monthly Foster Care Payments Work

A foster care payment begins on the day a child is placed in the foster home and ends on the day before the child leaves. Caregivers receive a check for the previous month.

Example: If the child is placed on October 18th, the foster family will receive payment for October 18-31 (14 days) on or about November 20. In December, the foster family will receive payment for the entire month of November, if the child was in their home for the entire month.

When a child moves into a higher age category, the licensed foster care rate is increased automatically. Children move into higher categories on their 1st, 5th, 9th and 12th birthdays.

NOTE: Private agencies determine monthly payment times for licensed homes under their supervision, but payments must be made monthly.

If You Do Not Receive Your Monthly Foster Care Check

Licensed Private Agency Caregivers

Contact your agency. Your agency is responsible for getting your monthly payment to you. Make sure that your agency has your correct address.

Licensed DCFS Foster Homes

If you have questions, or believe there is a problem, contact the caseworker or your Foster Parent Support Specialist (FPSS) or the local DCFS office for

assistance. Make sure that DCFS has your correct address. For an automated 24-hour message about when the last check was sent, or when to expect your next check, call the DCFS Payment Line at 800-525-0499.

Unlicensed Caregivers Receiving the Standard of Need Rate

Private agency caregivers receiving the Standard-of-Need rate shown on page 2 should call the 24-hour DCFS Payment Line at 800-525-0499 for the voicemail check mailing schedule. Staff are available during business hours to assist you with questions or problems.

Note: If there is a pattern of mishandled financial matters or circumstances meriting investigation and you have tried to work it out with your agency but nothing has changed, contact the Office of the Inspector General at 312-433-3000.

Who Pays For What?

Ask your agency for its policy and ask questions. DCFS Policy 359 explains exactly what DCFS pays for in DCFS-supervised foster homes, private agency supervised foster homes, group homes and in residential care. Questions about DCFS policy may be answered through the DCFS Advocacy Office for Children and Families at 800-232-3798.

One-Time Payments

DCFS has bottom-line responsibility for providing for a child's needs while in foster care. If you believe a child in your care needs something, ask the caseworker and the agency. If they agree, they will determine how to get it—from within the agency, from outside the agency, or from DCFS. If they don't know how to get something for a child, it is their responsibility to ask DCFS for help.

Before requesting a one-time payment from DCFS, the caseworker and agency must consider:

- appropriateness of the request according to individual circumstances surrounding the child, the case, or the foster family;
- DCFS' contractual agreement with the agency;
- other more appropriate sources of funding or services, such as from the school district or another state government department; and
- DCFS policy.

What DCFS will pay for and the circumstances under which DCFS will pay are given in DCFS Rule Section 359.7. Some of the major categories are explained in this section of the handbook.

All one-time payments from DCFS have a maximum allowable amount. Caseworkers will request the appropriate amount based on individual case circumstances or funding available from other sources. Maximum allowable amounts of each type

of payment mentioned in this section are not given because they are subject to change. The current allowable amounts may always be found in Appendix A of DCFS Procedure 359.7, which is public information. This procedure and all other DCFS policies, rules and procedures are available on the DCFS website at www.DCFS.illinois.gov.

Questions About Payments

Private Agency Policy and Supports — Ask your child’s caseworker and the agency.

DCFS Policy and Supports — Anyone with questions about DCFS payment policy or procedures may call the DCFS Advocacy Office for Children and Families at 800-232-3798. If your caseworker and agency and/or DCFS do not agree that the child needs the goods or services, you have the right to file a Service Appeal. (See Section 8, pages 26-28).

Clothing

The monthly licensed foster care payment includes funds to pay for a child’s clothing according to age, *including school clothes and school uniforms and new clothing needed due to changes in season and normal growth*. The caseworker/agency may request additional funds from DCFS for clothing under the following circumstances.

Initial Placement: Clothing/Personal Hygiene Expenses

When a child is placed, foster caregivers should review the child’s current clothing situation with the placing caseworker. Sometimes, when a child is removed from his home quickly, the caseworker will bring his clothes later. If the child has been in another foster home, all clothes, toys, personal hygiene items and belongings should be sent to the new foster home. If the child’s clothing appears inadequate, the caseworker may request an “initial clothing voucher” for a child in his first placement outside the home. *The initial clothing voucher may be requested at the time the case is opened or within 6 months of case opening.*

The child’s current wardrobe will be taken into account. Caregivers should be aware that there is a maximum, total amount allowable for the initial clothing voucher. If the child has moved more than once since initially coming into care, it could be that parts of the total amount may have been previously used in other placements. If the child has clothing needs, be sure to discuss this with the caseworker.

Initial personal hygiene items may also be requested by the caseworker for a child in her first placement outside the home when the case is opened. Examples of necessary items are: toothbrush, toothpaste, hairbrush/comb/pick, deodorant, feminine hygiene items, baby bottles, diapers, baby powder, baby oil and other essential items. Not allowed: make-up, perfume, jewelry, hairdryers, etc. The intention is to take care of the child’s immediate, basic needs.

Replacement Clothing

Caregivers are expected to replace a child's clothing using the monthly foster care payment. The caseworker/agency may request additional funds from DCFS for replacement clothing under these circumstances:

- a child whose clothes are unsuitable due to health or medical reasons, such as extraordinary weight gains or losses, excessive growth, or damage done to clothing to accommodate casts or braces;
- destruction of clothing by fire, flood, or the child's willful destruction;
- pregnant teens needing maternity clothes;
- children who had been in a Department of Corrections (DOC) facility and are now returning to foster care; and
- children who returned home for an extended period of time and then returned to foster care.

Notice to Caregivers Regarding Inadequate Clothing

If the child's caseworker feels that the child's wardrobe is inadequate, he or she will talk with the caregiver and provide the caregiver with the concerns or needed actions in writing. The caregiver will have 30 days to obtain the needed items. Except for circumstances that qualify for a replacement clothing voucher (see above) clothing is to be purchased from the clothing allotment of the monthly board payment. If the caregiver doesn't provide adequate wardrobe, the caseworker could request funds up to the allowed amount for replacement clothing. However, that amount could then be deducted from future monthly board payments. It is important to go through the child's clothing and discuss it with the caseworker early in the placement. Details are in DCFS Procedure 359.75.

Summer Camp/Activities

Caregivers whose licenses are supervised by a DCFS regional foster care program should be sure to discuss with the child's caseworker the procedure for summer camps and other vital enrichment activities. These are important activities for a child's overall development. Funding for camp, art and cultural activities is covered in Rule 359 Authorized Child Care Payments.

Caregivers for youth with open DCFS foster care cases should work with the child's caseworker to:

- identify the right program;
- confirm that the program is eligible for reimbursement under Rule 359;
- obtain written approval;
- pay for the camp in advance; and
- submit the expense for reimbursement.

Rule 359 caps annual camp expenses at \$260.35. Other enrichment activities will be evaluated for the appropriate prevailing rate. The caseworker can assist with the approval and the reimbursement. Funding is always subject to the budget that is given to DCFS.

Private Agency-Supervised Homes

For private agency foster families, the policy can differ from agency to agency. Every agency receives funds for “nonrecurring expenses” such as camp for some children. Ask the child’s caseworker about the camp policy for children at that agency.

Graduation Expenses

DCFS-Supervised Homes

For a student in DCFS foster care, policy covers payment for graduation expenses such as yearbook, pictures, cap and gown rental, class ring, new clothing for the graduation ceremony and other related fees.

The student must be in their junior or senior year for payment of the class ring. He or she must be in the senior year of high school to obtain payment for other graduation items. The total of all items purchased cannot exceed \$512.50. As an example, if a youth wishes to purchase a class ring, the foster caregiver could submit the bill to the caseworker, who would then secure direct payment to the vendor.

Private-Agency Supervised Homes

The specific procedures may differ for families caring for children whose case management is assigned to a private agency. Private agencies receive an administrative fee per child to take into account such non-recurring expenses like graduation. The agencies are expected to purchase the approved items and not expect caregivers to cover the costs. Be sure to talk to the child’s caseworker in advance about what is allowable, especially before making any purchases out-of-pocket.

DCFS does not have any stated policy regarding expenses for eighth grade graduation. Be sure to talk to the youth’s caseworker if you have questions about those expenses.

Infant Equipment

Sometimes, not having infant equipment can be a barrier to a caregiver taking the sibling of a child already in their home, or in taking an infant. A caseworker may request purchase authorization for a foster or relative home for infant care *equipment for a specific child age 2 and under*. The caregiver must sign the Infant Care Equipment Grant Application (DCFS Form: CFS 932C) and return a completed Infant Care List (DCFS Form: CFS 932D) for the appropriate items. The caregiver *must return the infant equipment to DCFS* if they stop providing infant care within one year of receiving the equipment.

Family Reunification Special Service Fee

The Family Reunification Special Service Fee is a reimbursement made directly to the caregiver for reunification activities to support a child with the permanency

goal to return home. It is a reimbursement that can cover expenses such as transportation, entrance fees, and food that are part of activities supporting foster children and their parents. A caregiver who engages the parent in up to 12 activities in a month would result in a \$400 reimbursement. Details on the qualifying activities are in Section 3, page 23.

- caregivers to children with a return home goal should document all of the reunification activities that are eligible for reimbursement. Date and describe each activity;
- the caregiver and the parent each sign the “log” on form CFS 1042-L as the event happens; and
- at the end of the month the caseworker should review the document, sign it and obtain a supervisor signature.

Sibling Visits

DCFS will reimburse foster families for transportation to sibling visits and compensate them for supervising short and overnight visits.

Under the plan, caregivers will receive reimbursement of up to \$50 per month for mileage (56.5 cents per mile, as of January 2013), public transportation, bus or taxi. The special service fee must be requested by the caseworker and be approved according to the visitation plan developed for the child.

Caregivers who support sibling visitation by supervising visits may also request reimbursement through their caseworker at a rate of \$25 per hour (excluding travel time) for a maximum of four hours (\$100) each month. If the visit is overnight or longer, the caregivers may, once a month, be reimbursed \$100 for the entire visit.

Tips About Payments From Experienced Caregivers

- Know your agency’s unique policies about payments or other types of supports. If you don’t have the agency policy in writing—ask!
- Document—in writing—your child’s need for services, or obtain written documentation from teachers, schools, therapists, etc. This will lend weight to your request with the caseworker. Also, documentation is required when making any request to DCFS. If you already have it, the caseworker can more easily and quickly make the request within the agency and from DCFS.
- Think ahead—don’t wait until the last minute to make a request. Your caseworker may have to talk to the teacher, doctor, or others and will need to submit the request within the agency for approval before it goes on to DCFS. All of these steps take time.
- If you question an answer given to you by the caseworker or agency about DCFS policy or procedure, first call the supervisor. If that does not help, call the DCFS Advocacy Office for Children and Families at 800-232-3798.

DAY CARE

Eligibility

DCFS will pay for child care for two-parent foster homes where both parents work, or single parent foster homes where the single caregiver works or is in job training or educational programs which will lead to employment. DCFS may also pay for child care for other documented reasons, such as disability of a caregiver, a disabling condition of a child or when day care is court-ordered.

In homes where there are two foster caregivers, both must be working, or at least one has to be working if the other is disabled. If a caregiver is disabled, a doctor's statement will be required. The statement must explain the extent of the disabling condition(s), including the duration, prognosis and how the disability impairs the person's ability to care for the child/ren in that home.

You are not eligible if, for any reason, you are not actually reporting to work, such as in the cases of seasonal/temporary employment, leave of absence, lay-off, etc. For example, a teacher would not be eligible for day care payment during the summer if he or she were employed for nine months but did not actually go to work during the summer. You also are not eligible if you are looking for work or to attend foster parent training. Caregivers who enroll a child in day care and are not eligible are subject to paying for the day care. If you are in doubt about your eligibility prior to enrolling a child, contact the regional DCFS Office Day Care Service Unit or the Office of Child Development (for Cook County) at 312-808-5060.

Day Care Rates

The amount DCFS will pay for day care depends on the type of day care chosen (day care center, licensed family day care home, babysitter, relative, etc.) and your location within Illinois.

There are maximum day care rates which can be paid for each type of care. Most day care centers and homes accept the state rate. If you want to choose one not accepting the state rate, you must pay the additional amount. Check with your caseworker or DCFS regional office (outside Cook County), or the DCFS Office of Child Development (Cook County ONLY).

Finding a Day Care Provider

Call the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) in your area. See page 11.

Identify yourself as a foster caregiver! The service will be FREE because you are inquiring on behalf of a child in foster care. The general public pays a modest fee for this service based on family size and income.

A CCR&R child care specialist will consult with you by phone and provide a list of local day care providers that meet your child's needs. Have this information handy: ZIP code; number of children needing day care and their ages; hours you will need day care; any special needs.

Tip: The caseworker must approve your selection of any day care provider. DCFS strongly encourages the use of licensed day care centers or licensed family day care homes. Ask the CCR&R child care specialist to discuss the advantages of licensed day care with you. Selecting a licensed day care provider makes the caseworker's approval decision much easier.

How to Make a Day Care Request

To make a day care request, contact your caseworker with your day care plan as soon as possible. The caseworker may have questions and must determine that the day care plan for the child or children is appropriate. The day care application should be part of the caseworker's packet when the child is placed, if day care is needed.

You and your caseworker will:

- complete the day care application (CFS 2002). Include spouse information if applicable;
- make sure to see the provider in person and be sure that the provider has the skills and physical capacity to care for the child;
- obtain the three signatures required: caregiver, caseworker and day care provider;
- attach needed documentation of employment and/or training:
 - employment documentation may be a recent check stub or employer letter stating hours worked per week or tax forms for self-employed caregivers;
 - training documentation can be a copy of your current class schedule or a letter from the school or training program; and
 - disability documentation is a doctor's letter detailing the extent of the disability if one parent is employed and one parent is disabled.

Keep copies of the application submitted, and all required documentation of employment or training. In case of loss or future questions, you will have what you need at your fingertips.

Your caseworker will determine if the potential day care provider is licensed to care for children according to guidelines for age and capacity. Unlicensed providers will have to have a CANTS background check.

Submit the completed application and all documentation to your regional DCFS Office Day Care Service Unit or the Office of Child Development (for Cook County cases) at 312-808-5060.

Completed applications with all signatures and documentation must be submitted no later than 30 days after the start of day care services to ensure timely payment. Submissions of day care applications after this time may result in payment delays to the day care provider and possible nonpayment. The state fiscal year ends June 30. Documentation must be received no later than July 15.

Non-Employment Related Day Care and Day Care for the Children of Teens in Care

Contact your regional DCFS Office Day Care Service Unit or the Office of Child Development (Cook County) to obtain the correct application form and procedures about how to apply.

Day Care Payment Approval Notification

After day care applications are approved by the regional DCFS Office Day Care Service Unit or Office of Child Development, both the caregiver and the day care provider will receive a computer-generated approval letter. Keep the approval letter in a file for future reference.

Day Care Provider Billing

Shortly after the day care provider receives the approval letter, and at the end of each month of service, DCFS mails a computer-generated billing form to the day care provider. The billing form should be completed, signed and returned without delay. Payments will normally be received within 2-3 weeks after bills are submitted.

Questions Regarding Payments

- the day care provider (not foster parent or teen) must call with their 6-digit Provider I.D. number. This is done for confidentiality; and
- the provider must give the specific month of payment and the name of the child.

Re-Determining Eligibility for Day Care

After you begin receiving day care, you must notify DCFS if:

- either caregiver stops working or attending school for any reason, including a leave of absence or disability;
- the child no longer needs day care;
- you change day care providers (this will require a new application);
- the day care provider's address changes;
- you adopt or become a subsidized guardian to the child; or

- the child no longer resides in your home. Note: Day care approval does not transfer to a child's new caregiver or to the birth parent when the child returns home. This will require a new application by the current caretaker.

Eligibility for day care services must be re-determined every six months or as deemed necessary by the regional DCFS Day Care Service Unit or the Cook County Office of Child Development. Completion of the re-determination, including the submission of any required documentation for employment, training or disability will be required for the continuation of day care service payment. You may contact the regional DCFS Office Day Care Service Unit or the Office of Child Development (for Cook County) at 312-808-5060 if you have questions or need assistance with the re-determination.

Call Your DCFS Office for Day Care Applications/Rates/Questions

Be ready to give the staff the following information when you call:

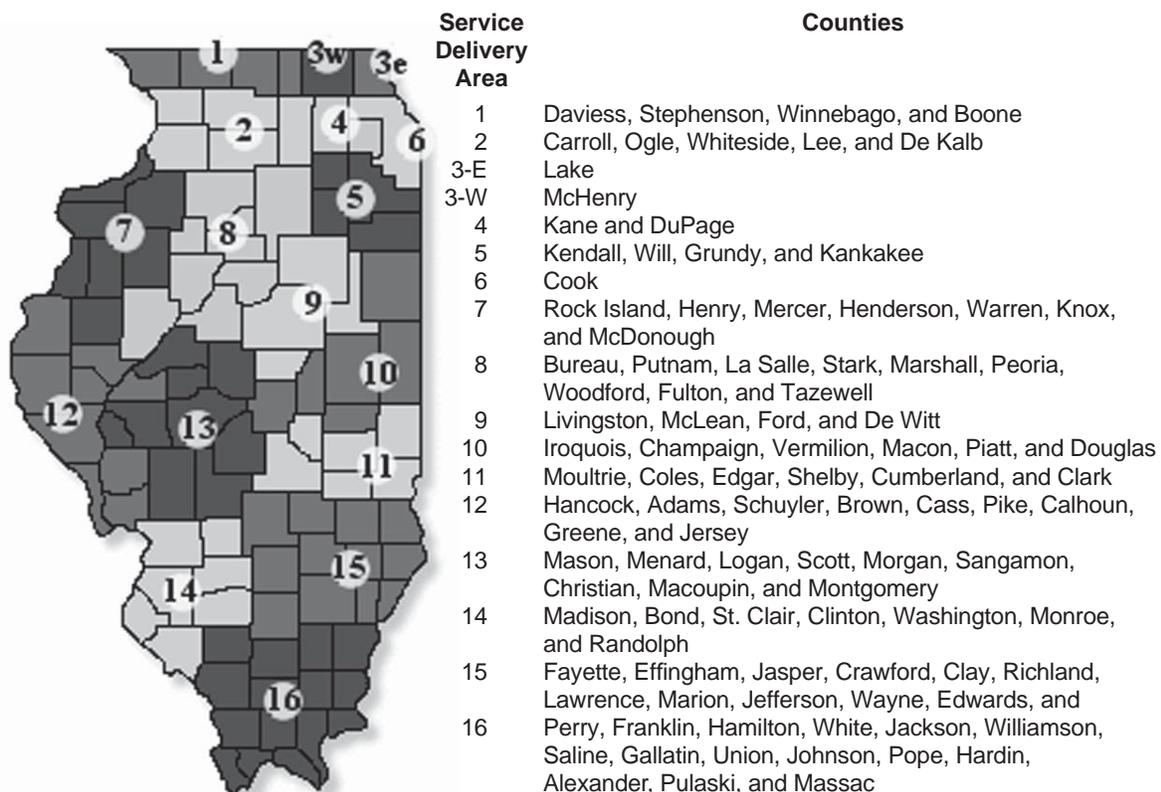
- your 5-digit Family I.D. number shown on the approval letter; and
- the name of the day care provider.

Cook County	DCFS Office of Child Development 1921 S. Indiana Aveune Chicago, IL 60616	312-808-5060 312-808-5131 Fax
Rockford/Aurora area	DCFS Day Care Unit 200 S. Wyman Street, 2nd Floor Rockford, IL 61101	815-987-7640 815-987-7275 Fax
Peoria area	DCFS Day Care Unit 5415 N. University Avenue Peoria, IL 61614	309-693-5400 309-693-2582 Fax
Champaign area	DCFS Day Care Unit 2125 S. 1 st Street Champaign, IL 61820	217-278-5500 217-278-5557 Fax
Springfield area	DCFS Day Care Unit 4500 S. 6 th Street Road Springfield, IL 62706	217-786-6830 217-786-6771 Fax
E. St. Louis area	DCFS Day Care Unit 10 Collinsville Avenue E. St. Louis, IL 6220	618-583-2100 618-583-2141fax
Marion area	DCFS Day Care Unit 2309 W. Main St. Suite 108 Marion, IL 62959	618-993-7122 618-993-5467 Fax

To Find Day Care Call Your Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Agency

Service Area	CCR & R Agency	Phone #
1	YMCA of Rockford	800-872-9780
2	DeKalb 4-C	800-848-8727
3	YWCA of NE Illinois (Lake County) YMCA of McHenry County	800-244-5376 815-459-4459 or 847-516-0037
4	YMCA of Metro Chicago	630-790-8137
5	Child Care Resource & Referral	800-552-5526
6	Cook County CCR &R	773-769-8000
7	Child Care Resource and Referral of Midwestern Illinois	309-277-0185 or 866-324-3236
8	Illinois Central College Child Care Connection	800-421-4371
9	CCR & R Network	800-437-8256
10	U of I: Child Care Resource Service Champaign County	800-325-5516 or 217-333-3252
11	Eastern Illinois University CCR &R	800-545-7439
12	West Central Child Care Connection	800-782-7318
13	Community Child Care Connection	800-676-2805
14	Children's Home + Aid	800-467-9200
15	Rend Lake College: Project Child	800-362-7257
16	John A. Logan College CCR &R	618-985-5975 or 800-548-5563

Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Service Delivery Areas



Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies
<http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/~ILCare/>

FOSTER CHILD DAMAGE REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM

What is it?

This program provides secondary insurance coverage for foster parents (over and above any other valid and collectable insurance held by the foster parents) for property damage and bodily injury caused by a child while the child is “in the care, custody and control” of the foster caregiver. DCFS automatically provides this coverage at no cost to all foster families and relative caregivers. The coverage is described in full in DCFS’ Administrative Procedure 13, which will be sent to foster caregivers who file a claim or request a copy.

What Specifically is Covered? What Are the Limits?

Physical Damage to the Property of Others

Description: Damage caused by a child to other people’s property while the child is in foster care.

Limits of Coverage: \$5,000 per fiscal year. Payments will be made based on an “actual cash value” basis, which is the amount it would cost to repair or replace the damaged property with material/s of like kind and quality, less allowable deductions for normal physical deterioration and depreciation based on the age, condition and normal life expectancy of the property.

Physical Damage to the Property of the Foster Family

Description: The child causes damage to the foster family’s property.

Limits of Coverage: \$5,000 per fiscal year. Payments will be made based on an “actual cash value” basis as described above as well as in Administrative Procedure #13.

Bodily Injury to Others

Description: The child in foster care injures someone outside the foster family.

Limits of Coverage: \$5,000 per fiscal year.

Bodily Injury to Members of the Foster Family

Description: The child in foster care injures a member of the foster family.

Limits of Coverage: \$5,000 per fiscal year.

How Do Caregivers File a Claim?

Immediately notify the child’s caseworker that a claim needs to be filed. The caseworker will view the damage and request that a claim form be sent directly to the caregiver.

Complete the claim form, have the child’s caseworker sign it, attach all pertinent receipts and other supporting documents, and have the caseworker make a copy of everything for the caregiver before they mail it to:

Foster Child Damage Reimbursement Program Coordinator
Department of Children and Family Services
James R. Thompson Center
100 W. Randolph, 6th Floor
Chicago, IL 60601
Phone: 312-814-7294

Note: The insured caregiver must provide the names, addresses and the policy numbers for any homeowner or health insurance that is currently in force, including employer or school insurance. They must also provide documentation of what the insurance covered or a denial of coverage. The uninsured caregiver must provide a notarized written statement if there is no primary insurance coverage.

How does DCFS handle the claim?

The DCFS Program Coordinator will review the claim to ensure that all necessary information is present and forward it to the Review Committee.

The Review Committee meets every month. Once a decision for payment is approved or denied, the caregiver will be contacted by mail. If payment for the claim is approved, the foster parent will receive reimbursement within 8 to 12 weeks.

All payments for claims will be paid to the party which incurred the damage or sustained the injury.

When can a foster caregiver NOT collect?

- if the damages caused by the child resulted from inadequate supervision on the part of the caregivers OR as a result of the caregivers not following the standards and requirements set forth in the DCFS Licensing Standards;
- if the caregivers are covered for the full amount of the claim by their own insurance policy;
- if the caregivers don’t first file a claim with their own insurance;
- if the claim does not contain proof of payment or the estimated replacement cost of an item, from an established business;
- if an act allegedly occurs, but cannot be proven, such as the child denying a theft which cannot be verified;
- if the claim is untrue, false, fraudulent or the actual facts have been tampered with or distorted; and
- if damages arose out of the business pursuits of a caregiver.

SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME (SSI) BENEFITS

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a Federal Government Program that provides cash assistance to persons age 65 or older and to blind or disabled persons of any age who have limited income and assets. Children, including children in foster care, adopted children and children in guardianship may qualify for SSI if they have a severe physical or mental impairment, or a combination of impairments, that significantly limit their ability to function in an age-appropriate manner. Even though a child meets the disability requirements, other factors may prevent entitlement to SSI.

For example:

- if a child in foster care is receiving assistance from another Federal Program (Title IV-E) he or she will not be eligible for SSI;
- part of the income and assets of the adoptive parents count when determining the income and assets of an adopted child until he or she reaches 18. This may make their child ineligible for SSI; and
- if a subsidy is paid to a guardian who has accepted responsibility for a child with disabilities that was formerly in foster care, the amount of the subsidy may count as income to the child. Counting the subsidy may reduce or eliminate the SSI payment.

How Does a Child in Foster Care Apply for SSI?

SSI claims are filed with the Social Security Administration. DCFS as legal guardian of children in foster care is the appropriate agency to file the SSI applications. DCFS has contracted to handle Social Security matters, including SSI, for children in foster care. Referrals can be sent to DCFS at 217-524-6186, who will forward the referral to the current contractor. The contractor will review a child's records to decide if he or she is a candidate for SSI. They welcome referrals from caregivers. They will prepare the application packages and send them to DCFS for the signature of the Guardianship Administrator. DCFS forwards the application packages to Social Security. The disability decisions are made by the Department of Human Services (DHS) - Bureau of Disability Determinations Services, located in Springfield.

They also file appeals of denied claims, if they feel the denial of benefits is not correct. Also, if a case is approved, Social Security must review the case periodically to see if the child continues to be eligible. These reviews are called Continuing Disability Reviews. There are forms required for these reviews if a child is still in foster care when the review comes up on the Social Security schedule.

What Should Caregivers Do to Support SSI Claims?

First, caregivers should discuss with the caseworker whether to refer children who may be eligible for SSI. If a caregiver is not sure about SSI, they should make the referral and let the organization decide if a claim is appropriate.

Second, when the contractor prepares an application, Continuing Disability Review or files an appeal, they will contact the caregiver for information about the child's daily activities. It is important for the caregiver to cooperate in providing detailed information about the child's condition. Remember that the person making the decision about the application does not see the child. It is vital to the process that the people who see the child most often and know the child well give accurate reports for the application package. Timely responses are important.

Adjudicators from the DHS Bureau of Disability Determination Services will contact foster parents:

- to discuss the child's condition. Caregivers should cooperate fully with the adjudicators who are trying to decide if the child in foster care has limitations that meet the Social Security requirements for disability; and
- when there is not enough medical evidence in a child's file, caregivers may be asked to arrange for an examination by a doctor working with the Bureau of Disability Determination Services. It is especially important that the caregivers cooperate with the doctor and the adjudicator in seeing that the child attends the examination.

What Happens to the SSI Money When an Application is Approved?

DCFS receives the checks on behalf of the children in foster care. These funds are used to reimburse the child's foster care payments for room and board. If a child has needs that are not being met by the foster care payment, the foster parent should contact the caseworker. The caseworker can contact the staff that oversees the SSI funds. This staff can verify the amount of funds that may be available for these special circumstances or needs and will advise the caseworker if there are any SSI benefits available. Social Security Regulations define how SSI benefits may be used. The caseworker and other staff work together to insure that these regulations are followed.

What About Adopted Children and Those in Guardianship?

Even if DCFS has helped a child obtain SSI while he or she was in foster care, the parent or guardian becomes responsible for conducting all SSI business with Social Security when the child has left foster care. The parent or guardian should contact the local Social Security office for help with SSI.

TIPS FOR MANAGING CHILD WELFARE PAYMENTS

Foster caregivers and adoptive/guardianship families will encounter many types of expenditures, which may or may not be reimbursed according to DCFS policy. It is always advised to consult with the child's caseworker, subsidy worker or the DCFS Central Payment Unit in advance.

Questions About Payments

Private Agency Policy and Supports — Ask your child's caseworker and the agency.

DCFS Policy and Supports — Anyone with questions about DCFS payment policy or procedures may call the DCFS Advocacy Office for Children and Families at 800-232-3798.

If your caseworker and agency and/or DCFS do not agree that the child needs the goods or services, you have the right to file a Service Appeal. (See Section 8, pages 26-28).