



Childcare Fees Policy – Charlton Early Years Centre

Best Practice – Quality Area 7

Purpose

This policy will provide guidelines for families and Shine Bright staff to ensure that there is a clear and transparent process in relation to the collection of fees for children accessing Shine Bright childcare services. The policy will ensure the viability of the Shine Bright's childcare services by setting appropriate, equitable and non-discriminatory fees.

Policy statement

Values

Shine Bright EYM (Shine Bright) is committed to:

- Providing responsible financial management of the service, which includes establishing fees that will result in a financially viable centre while keeping childcare fees at the lowest possible level
- Providing a fair and manageable system for dealing with the non-payment and/or inability to pay fees/outstanding debts
- Maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of parents/guardians
- Advising families/guardians about how the programs are funded, including government support and parent/guardian fees

Scope

This policy applies to Shine Bright as the Approved Provider, Shine Bright staff and parents/guardians whose child/ren is/are attending, or who wish to enrol a child at a Shine Bright childcare service.

Background and legislation

Background

Shine Bright is a not for profit organisation, managing a number of community based kindergartens, delivering high quality education and care for children and families in the Bendigo, Campaspe, Buloke, Mildura and Swan Hill regions. Our focus is on providing high quality education to our local community as we understand and advocate for the benefits that children experience throughout their lives if they are provided with high quality education in their early years.

Shine Bright has also delivers childcare services in Bendigo and Charlton. We are a registered Child Care Subsidy (CCS) provider.

Legislation and standards

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Vic), as amended 2011
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic), as amended 2012
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010: sections 168 and 323
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011: Reg 73-76
- Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework 2016
- A New Tax System (Family Assistance and Related Measures) Act 2000

Procedures

The Approved Provider is responsible for:

- Implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians and staff and in line with the requirements of relevant legislation
- Developing a fee policy that balances the capacity of parent/guardian's capability to pay, providing a high-quality program and maintaining service viability
- Considering any issues regarding fees that may be a barrier to families enrolling in a childcare service and removing those barriers wherever possible
- Considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families
- Clearly communicating this policy and payment options to families
- Making the Childcare Fees Policy (full version) readily accessible on Shine Bright EYM's website and at the relevant centres
- Collecting all fees as per the guidelines outlined in Attachment 1 of this policy
- Complying with the Shine Bright Confidentiality/Privacy Policy in regard to any information it receives relating to the financial situation of parents/guardians and the payment/non-payment of fees
- Notifying parents/guardians within 28 days of any changes to the arrangements for the payment of fees

Shine Bright Staff are responsible for:

- Informing Shine Bright of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding the fees at the service
- Referring parent's/guardian's questions in relation to this policy to Shine Bright EYM Central Office, Finance Department.
- Complying with Shine Bright's Confidentiality/Privacy Policy regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of Fees

Parents/Guardians are responsible for:

- Paying fees by the due dates
- Ensuring Shine Bright have current contact details
- Reading this Fees Policy available on the website
- Notifying Shine Bright EYM Central Office if experiencing difficulties with the payment of fees
- Informing Shine Bright Central Office if their child is withdrawing from the service by providing at least 2 weeks written notice.

Evaluation

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, Shine Bright will:

- Assess the effectiveness of the payment options and procedures for the collection of fees
- Review the current budget to determine fee income requirements
- Take into account feedback from educators (staff) and parents/guardians regarding the policy
- Monitor complaints and incidents regarding the policy
- Review the number of families experiencing financial hardship and the effectiveness of the procedures for late payment and support offered
- Monitor the number of families/children excluded from the centre because of the non-payment of fees.

Attachments

- Attachment 1: Billing and Fees
- Attachment 2: Fee Structure

This policy was adopted by the Approved Provider of Shine Bright in December 2023.

Review date: November 2024



ATTACHMENT 1 – BILLING AND FEES

1. Setting fees and other charges

As part of the budget development process, Shine Bright sets fees for the programs for the following year, taking into consideration:

- Financial viability of childcare services
- Fees charged by similar services in the area
- Level of government funding, including the Child Care Subsidy, provided for the service
- Capacity of parents/guardians to pay
- Reasonable expenditure, ensuring agreed program quality/standards

2. Review of fees

Shine Bright will review fees on an annual basis and will inform families within 28 days of any changes to the arrangements for the payment of fees.

3. Billing

Families will be billed on a fortnightly basis. Fees are to be paid two weeks in advance, at all times. The payment method is for families to set up direct debit or credit card payment through Debitsuccess.

4. Overdue Accounts

Parents will be notified when their fee payments are due or in arrears.

- If a family fails to pay the required fees on time, a reminder letter will be issued after one week and then again after two weeks, where the fees are still outstanding.
- A child's position will be terminated if payment has not been made after three weeks. The family will receive a final letter terminating the child's position. At this time the service will initiate its debt collection procedure.
- Shine Bright reserves the right to take action to recover outstanding childcare fees. This can include the engagement of debt collectors to which all costs, including legal will be forwarded on to the account holder (parent/guardian).

5. Financial difficulties and Payment Plans

Shine Bright understands that unexpected and difficult situations may occur for which you are not financially prepared and which can lead to financial hardship. Shine Bright will individually assess each request for assistance, please contact Centre Management for a confidential discussion about your financial situation.

One type of assistance may be through the implementation of a payment plan with Shine Bright. The payment plan should be designed to clear debts while maintaining regular payments for any childcare services. Payment plans must be negotiated and agreed on the basis that ongoing fees for services will remain current and the additional payments are only to clear debts so that the arrears and late payment fees do not continue to increase.

Families may be able to seek support if they are experiencing temporary financial hardship through Centrelink:

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/additional-child-care-subsidy/how-apply/applying-during-temporary-financial-hardship>

6. Dishonour Fee

If a payment to Debitsuccess is declined, a dishonour fee will be administered by Debitsuccess on each occasion for administrative purposes.

7. Casual Bookings

If your child is enrolled for a minimum of one permanent booked day, you can enrol your child for additional casual days, subject to availability. Families must contact the centre directly to book casual days.

- Families can book up to 2 weeks in advance
- Families cannot book any closer than 3 working days to the day of care
- If a casual day needs to be cancelled, families must cancel within 48 hours to the day of care, otherwise, they will be charged for the day.

8. Additional days

Additional days may be booked, however additional days cannot be taken in lieu of permanent booked days. This includes public holidays. Additional days must be booked directly through the service, either by phone or email. Due to current high enrolment demand, there is no guarantee of additional days being available.

9. Late Collection Fees

The daily fees are based on the opening hours provided for the centre. In the event that a family is late collecting their child from the service, additional costs are incurred. A late collection fee will be charged at \$15 for the first 5 minutes and then \$10 every 10 minutes after that.

These fees will be imposed at the discretion of Shine Bright. If a family is delayed through unavoidable circumstances, they must contact the centre staff to advise of the details and when the child will be collected. If the centre has not been contacted, a staff member will attempt to contact both parents and emergency contacts before calling the police.

A review of the child's enrolment will occur where families are consistently late.

10. Public Holidays, Code Red Days and days of declared emergency

Families will be charged for Public Holidays Code Red Days and other days of declared emergencies at the same rate as a regular day of care, despite the centre being closed on those days. If your child was due to attend on a day that falls on a public holiday, it will be counted as an absence and you will still be subject to receiving the Childcare Subsidy so that you only need to pay the gap. Families are unable to claim family holiday discount for public holidays and families are unable to switch days if their booked day falls on a public holiday.

The only exceptions to this are the Public Holidays for Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day. Families will not be charged for these three Public Holidays.

Note: In situations where the Federal Government has declared a period of emergency in the Charlton region, we may be able to waive gap fees. This will remain at the discretion of Shine Bright.

11. Centre closures

Families will not be charged for services on days where the centre is closed by Shine Bright, for example staff development days and Christmas/New Year period closures. If the centre is closed on a Public Holiday, a Code Red day or a day of a declared emergency, families will be charged for these days (see section 10 above). Families will need to arrange alternative care for their children on these days and will be notified of the dates in advance.

Note: In situations where the Federal Government has declared a period of emergency in the Charlton region, we may be able to waive gap fees. This will remain at the discretion of Shine Bright.

12. Family Holidays and Non-attendance days

Under the Child Care Subsidy System (CCSS) CCS is strictly monitored.

When a child does not attend the service for reasons such as illness or holidays, families will continue to be charged for services according to the child's regular booking. Families who take extended holiday periods but wish to hold their child's place at the centre will be expected to pay the regular fees for the place at the centre. However, families can apply for a holiday discount during their nominated holiday periods when the centre is open. This is available for no more than 4 weeks (pro-rata) per year and is provided if families give two weeks notification in writing of their holiday period. Holiday discounts are not available on public holidays.

A child is allowed to have 42 absences in the 2023/2024 financial year for any reason, but a fee must be charged to gain CCS. Once 42 absences have been reached, documented proof is required for any additional absences, for continued CCS entitlement as assessed by the Department of Human Services. A fee is still required to be charged to claim CCS.

13. Notification of absenteeism

If a child is to be absent for the day, parents are requested to advise staff by telephoning the service as soon as possible (or by 8.30am on the day of care at the latest). If the child is sick it is important to inform the service of the nature of the illness, symptoms and any diagnosis is helpful in containing the spread of illness. Families will be charged for services on this day.

14. Recommencement of care after Christmas closure

It will be assumed that families will resume their normal bookings on re-opening, and will be charged as normal. Please advise the centre of changes to bookings or alternative start dates by the 1st of December to allow for staffing. If you do not notify us that your child will not be attending when we re-open you will be charged for an absence.

15. Cancellation of Booking

Families are asked to provide at least 2 weeks written notice prior to the day you intend to be your child's last day booked. Fees will continue to apply until a written cancellation (email is acceptable) of the booking is received. If your child does not attend the service for the any of the last two weeks, without a medical certificate, full fees will apply and you will not be eligible for Child Care Subsidy.

If you are receiving the Child Care Subsidy, you must also remember that it's imperative for your child to attend their last booked day, to avoid being charged cessation of care by the Australian government.

16. Fee Subsidy Entitlements (Child Care Subsidy)

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is available to all Parents/Guardians who meet the eligibility requirements. Parents/Guardians receive this as a deduction from fees.

Most Australian families are entitled to the Child Care Subsidy (CCS). The level of CCS entitlements varies according to three factors - combined family income, activity test (the activity level of both parents) and service type (type of childcare service). Please visit the Department of Human Services website to best understand how the Child Care Subsidy works and how to apply online.

To be eligible, families must apply for CCS online at www.humanservices.gov.au/families through myGov or phone 136 150 between 8am and 8pm (local time) Monday to Friday or visit a Service Centre. Families are unable to receive the Child Care Subsidy without completing this process.

We recommend that families do this early so that their subsidy is approved and ready by the time care for their child commences. Full fees will be charged until CCS is approved.

17. Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS)

Parents whose family circumstances suddenly change, causing short term financial difficulties, may be eligible for Additional Child Care Subsidy. More information is available from the Department of Human Services.

ATTACHMENT 2 – FEE STRUCTURE

Shine Bright's childcare fees as at 1 January 2024 are outlined below. Shine Bright will review fees on an six monthly basis and will inform families within 28 days of any changes to the arrangements for the payment of fees.

Long day care fee – daily rate (permanent booking)	\$125
Long day care fee – daily rate (casual booking)	\$130
Before kindergarten care (8:00am to 8:45am)	\$20
After kindergarten care (1:45pm to 5:00pm)	\$45
Late Collection Fees – first 5 minutes	\$15
Late collection fee - every 10 minutes after first 5 minutes	\$10