

Thinking About Becoming a Guardian?

Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP) Frequently Asked Questions.



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

Introduction

The **Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP)** helps support families who take legal guardianship of a child and youth in foster care. GAP is a subsidy program available to licensed caregivers who become legal guardians of children in state care.

If you're considering becoming a guardian, read these frequently asked questions to learn what makes a child, youth, and guardian eligible for this support.



Questions and Answers

Q: What is included in the GAP?

A: Monthly Cash Subsidy: You'll receive a monthly payment to help cover the child's living expenses. The amount is based on the needs of the child and the caregivers' circumstances. You will receive this as a check or direct deposit.

Medical/Dental Coverage (Medicaid): If you remain in Washington state, then Apple Health Core Connections (AHCC) may continue to be available. If you live out of state or move out of state, Washington may not be able to provide medical coverage. Some guardians have private policies that allow the child to be included, but not all. Check with your provider. For more information, read: *Guardianship and Adoption Comparison Guide (CWP_0117)*: www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/CWP_0117.pdf.

Non-recurring Guardianship Cost: Most guardianships don't cost anything because they're handled through the dependency court. If you do have a one-time legal related expense for becoming a guardian, DCYF may be able to help.

DCYF may reimburse you up to \$2,000 per child for costs like:

- Court and attorney directly related to the guardianship
- Other reasonable costs directly related to setting up a Title 13 guardianship
- There are some limits, and **you'll need approval before spending money you want reimbursed**. If you have questions or want to know if your costs qualify, please talk with your HQ GAP Specialist.



Q: Am I eligible for the GAP subsidy?

A: GAP helps support families who take legal guardianship of a child in foster care. Here's what DCYF looks at to decide if a child and guardian are eligible:

1. Age Requirement: The child must be under 18 years old when the GAP agreement is signed and the guardianship is finalized in court.

2. Out-of-Home Placement

- The child must be in a dependency through DCYF or a federally recognized Tribe in Washington state. Dependency must be established for all parents.
- The child must have been removed from their home by a court because it was not safe or in their best interest to stay there.

3. Licensed Foster Home

- You must be a fully licensed foster parent (not just in the initial licensing stage).
- You must have received foster care payments for at least six months in a row after becoming fully licensed.
- You must still be licensed at the time the guardianship is finalized.

4. Placement Duration

- The child must have lived with you for at least six continuous months after you became fully licensed.
- **Or** the child is being placed with you and you're already receiving a GAP subsidy for their sibling.

5. Income: Your income does not affect whether the child qualifies for GAP but will be considered when deciding how much the monthly payment will be.

RCW 13.36.090 (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=13.36.090>)

Q: What goes into calculating my child’s monthly GAP subsidy?

A: The amount of the subsidy is based on a full review of the child’s needs and family’s circumstances. We use this information to make sure the support is fair and meets the real needs of the child and the family.

Child’s Needs (60% of the decision)

- **Health Needs (20%):** Does your child need regular doctor visits, medications, or therapy? We use their current foster care level to help figure this out.
- **Education Needs (20%):** Is your child in, Head Start, or do they have an IEP or 504 Plan? We consider how much support they need at school.
- **Other Costs (20%):** This includes things like sports, band, clubs, or anything else that helps your child grow and learn.

2. Family Situation (40% of the decision)

- **Family Size (10%):** Bigger families usually have more expenses.
- **Income (5%):** We look at your income, but it won’t disqualify you.
- **Living Costs (10%):** We consider your regular bills like rent, food, and utilities.
- **Family’s Financial Resources (5%):** If you have other financial support, we include that.
- **Community Resources (10%):** We also count help you get from programs like food banks or housing support.

WAC 110-85-0100 (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=110-85-0100>)



Q: How does DCYF figure out the amount of my monthly GAP subsidy?

A: We want to make sure the support we provide matches the needs of the child and the circumstances of the family. **Here’s how we figure out the amount of the GAP subsidy:**

1. Look at two main areas

- **Child’s and Youth’s Needs (60%) Includes:** medical needs, emotional or behavioral challenges, and educational support.
- **Family Circumstances (40%) Includes:** household income, other children or dependents you care for, and your ability to meet the child’s needs.

2. Score each area

We give each area a score based on the information you provide. Then we apply the weights:

- 60% of the total score comes from the child’s needs.
- 40% comes from your family’s situation.

3. Use the score to decide the level of help

The higher the score, the more help may be available. We have different levels of assistance based on the total score.

4. Stay within legal limits

DCYF understands that most families want to know exactly how much the GAP offer will be, but it’s hard to give a number right away. The agency needs to gather all the details and go through the negotiation process first. In most cases, the GAP offer isn’t at the very top of that range. That’s because we try to balance the child’s needs with what the family can realistically provide.

Most GAP offers end up somewhere between 65% to 75% of Foster Care Maintenance Level. By law, the GAP subsidy (payment) cannot be more than a certain percentage of what the child would have received in foster care.

These limits depend on the child's age:

- **Under age 5:** Cannot exceed 80% of the foster care maintenance rate
- **Ages 5 to 9:** Cannot exceed 90%
- **Ages 10 to 18:** Cannot exceed 95%

RCW 74.13A.047 (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=74.13A.047>)

Additional Questions?

The HQ GAP Specialist are happy to walk you through how your offer was decided on.

Q: What paperwork do I need to provide?

A: When you apply for the GAP subsidy, we may ask for some documents to help confirm the information you share.

- **Application Form:** Most of the information we need comes from the GAP Subsidy Application Form 15-392 Initial Application for the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP) Subsidy (https://dcyf.wa.gov/forms?field_number_value=15-392&title=)
- **Supporting Documents:** You might be asked to share things like:
 - Health records
 - School reports
 - Bills or pay stubs

These help us confirm details about the child's needs and your financial situation.

We trust the information you provide. But if something seems unclear or doesn't match up, we may ask for more documents.

Q: What is a successor guardian, and do I need one?

A: A successor guardian is someone you name in your GAP agreement who will care for the child or youth if you're ever unable to (i.e. you become seriously ill or pass away).

If you have named a successor guardian, they may be able to receive the monthly GAP payment to help care for the child. But just naming them in

the agreement isn't enough to make them the legal guardian, there are a few more steps to make it official.

Here's what else needs to happen:

- They must be legally appointed by the court to become the child's legal guardian. This means they'll need to go through a legal process, even if they're already listed in the GAP agreement.
- Everyone in the successor guardian's home who is 16 or older must pass a background check.
- They do not need to be licensed as a foster parent to become the guardian.

If circumstances change for the person listed as the successor guardian, you can request a change by contacting a HQ GAP Specialist at dcyf.gapspecialist@dcyf.wa.gov

Q: How long until I start to receive the GAP funds?

A: After you sign the GAP agreement, it's in a 'pending' status until the guardianship is finalized in court. Once finalized, you'll get a welcome email from the GAP team at DCYF, and your GAP payments will begin shortly after. Sometimes the guardianship is finalized quickly and other times it takes months. Check-in with the child or youth's case worker to find out more about the guardianship process.

Once the guardianship is finalized in court there will likely be a short delay in switching payments from foster care to GAP. This is due to the length of time for notification of court processes, system updates, and payment timelines. If you have questions during this time reach out to your HQ GAP Specialist for help.



Q: What do I need to do to start the GAP subsidy payments after the guardianship is finalized?

A: After the guardianship is finalized in court:

- You'll start getting a monthly invoice, just like the one you received for foster care payments.
- You will also receive a termination notice for your Foster Care Maintenance.
- Claim your invoice to receive your GAP subsidy each month.
- You have three options either by phone, online, or mail.
- For more information on how to claim your invoices, set up direct deposit and any other payment question visit:

<https://dcyf.wa.gov/services/foster-parenting/kinship-caregivers/resources/payments/foster-care-payments>

<https://dcyf.wa.gov/services/foster-parenting/support-resources>



Q: When and how can I request a change to my GAP subsidy?

A: You can ask for a change (or modification) to your GAP subsidy only if your child's needs or your family's circumstances have changed.

You can make a request if:

- Your child's health, behavior, or educational needs have changed.
- Your family situation has changed in a way that affects your ability to care for the child. This could include changes in finances or the loss of a spouse due to divorce or death.

How to Request a Modification

1. Send an email: Write to your HQ GAP Specialist at dcyf.gapspecialist@dcyf.wa.gov explaining what has changed and why you believe the subsidy should be reviewed.

2. Complete the worksheet: The specialist will send you a form called the "GAP Modification Family and Child or Youth Information Worksheet."

3. You may need to provide supporting documents:

- Medical records
- School reports
- Treatment plans
- Any other documents that show the change in needs

What happens next?

- DCYF will review your worksheet and documents.
- If the change is confirmed, they will recalculate your subsidy based on the new information.

Q: What happens when the youth turns 18?

A: The Extended Guardianship Assistance Program (EGAP) helps youth who have received GAP support continue to get help, up to their 21st birthday — if they still qualify.

This agreement is between you (the guardian), the youth, and DCYF and is different than the original agreement. The monthly cash subsidy can only go to the guardian.

If eligible, the EGAP subsidy includes:

- A monthly cash payment (amount agreed upon in the new EGAP agreement) to the guardian.
- Medicaid (if eligible under federal or state rules)

We will send you a reminder letter a few months before the child turns 18.

For more information on EGAP read *Extended Support Programs For Youth and Young Adults (CWP_0121)*: www.dcyf.wa.gov/publications-library/CWP_0121



Additional Resources

Guardianship and Adoption Comparison Guide

https://dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/CWP_0117.pdf

Permanency Planning Matrix

www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/CWP_0088.pdf

Extended Support Programs for Youth and Young Adults

www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/CWP_0121.pdf

Training, community resources, and Pass Program

www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/foster-parenting/support-resources

Kinship Navigators

www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/home-and-community-services-kinship-care/kinship-care

Basic Needs Community Resource Directory

www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/housing-basic-needs



www.dcyf.wa.gov

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