

# Child Care Safety and Funding

## Frequently Asked Questions



The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) values our licensed child care providers and deeply appreciates the essential work they do every day to care for and educate our youngest learners. The safety and well-being of children—and of the dedicated professionals who care for them—remains our top priority.

DCYF is providing this FAQ resource to address questions we've received from child care providers. This is intended for general informational purposes only and is not legal advice. Providers facing specific situations should consult local law enforcement, a private attorney, or other qualified professionals for guidance tailored to their circumstances.

**Thank you for the safe, nurturing care you provide for the children and families in your communities.**

Below are links to communication released to date:

- Message to Child Care Providers Regarding Federal Funding and Provider Safety: <https://dcyf.wa.gov/news/message-child-care-providers-regarding-federal-funding-and-provider-safety-espanol-soomaali>
- Message for Child Care Providers in Response to Ongoing Media Coverage: <https://dcyf.wa.gov/news/message-child-care-providers-response-ongoing-media-coverage-english-espanol-soomaali-francais>
- DCYF Statement in Response to Ongoing Media Coverage Surrounding Child Care Providers: <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/news/dcyf-statement-response-ongoing-media-coverage-surrounding-child-care-providers>

## Site Access and Provider Support

**Q Are child care providers required to allow media, social media, or unknown people into their child care facilities?**

**A** *No. As a private business, providers are not required to allow the public into their child care facilities. This includes the media and any unknown people.*

**Q Are child care providers allowed to lock doors and restrict access during operating hours to protect children and staff?**

**A** *Yes. Programs may lock doors for the safety of children and staff as long as emergency exits remain accessible and can open from the inside (WAC 110-300-0166 <https://app.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=110-300-0166>). Providers can contact their licensor with emergency exit questions.*

**Q What is considered a public space, and what actions are not permitted even when someone is in a public space? Are there differences between the public space operated by a center or by a family home child care?**

**A** *Generally, public spaces are areas freely open to anyone without permission, such as public sidewalks, streets, roads, and parks. From these public areas, individuals may observe or record what is in plain view (for example, filming the exterior of a building, windows, or house). Private businesses—such as child care programs and the homes they may run their business from—are not considered public spaces. You have the right to ask someone to leave your property if it is not a public space.*



**Q How can child care providers verify the identity of DCYF staff before allowing entry?**

**A** DCYF staff visiting your facility must clearly display their DCYF badge, introduce themselves, and explain the purpose of their visit. For unannounced visits, licensors will contact the provider (call or text) once they are on-site for the unannounced visit. Providers can call the local DCYF Child Care Licensing office (<https://dcyf.wa.gov/find-an-office/el-offices>) to confirm the identity of the licensor.

**Q What steps should child care providers take if they feel unsafe due to harassment, filming, or intimidation? What should providers do if individuals come as a group, wear masks, or repeatedly show up to film or question them?**

**A** The safety of children and the people caring for them is a top priority for DCYF. No one should feel threatened or intimidated while caring for children. Providers should prioritize safety. If anyone is in immediate danger, call 911. Move children to a secure area away from any disruption if possible. If there is no immediate danger or risk of harm, call local law enforcement and work directly with them to address these issues. You should also report these situations to your licensor as soon as possible. If you have experienced a hate crime or an incident of bias, you may report that to the Attorney General's Office using the information below.

- Hate Crimes & Bias Incident Hotline: 1-855-225-1010 (interpreters are available Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.)
- Online at [www.atg.wa.gov/report-hate](http://www.atg.wa.gov/report-hate)

**Q What support and guidance can DCYF provide when providers experience harassment, intimidation, or safety concerns?**

**A** No one should feel threatened, harassed, or intimidated when caring for children. In these situations, harassment, intimidation, and safety concerns must go through the appropriate law enforcement and legal channels. DCYF can support providers through technical assistance so that children remain in stable, safe, and uninterrupted care. Providers experiencing these concerns can contact their licensor for technical assistance.



**Q How does DCYF coordinate with law enforcement when providers experience trespass, harassment, or threats to child safety?**

**A** DCYF is not a law enforcement agency and does not conduct criminal investigations. However, the safety of children and providers is our top priority. DCYF takes all reports of threats, harassment, trespassing, and other concerns affecting providers seriously. To that end, if DCYF receives a report involving bias, hate incidents, or harassment, we may share information with or refer to the Attorney General's Office, which has a dedicated Hate Crimes & Bias Incident Hotline DCYF and the AGO are in communication regarding the harassment reported by providers.

- Hate Crimes & Bias Incident Hotline: 1-855-225-1010 (interpreters are available Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.)
- Online at [www.atg.wa.gov/report-hate](http://www.atg.wa.gov/report-hate)

**Q Is filming or photographing children, child care entrances, or child care operations permitted without parental consent?**

**A** Child care providers are required per WAC 110-300-0450 (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=110-300-0450>) to have a parent or guardian's permission before providers photograph, videotape, or surveil their child. Providers are not required to allow media or unknown people into their child care facilities. Generally, filming and recording what is in plain view from public spaces—including children, child care entrances, and child care operations—is not prohibited for members of the general public. If such filming or recording places anyone in immediate danger, call 911. If there is no immediate danger or risk of harm, call local law enforcement and work directly with them to address the issue.

## Child Care Check and Provider Information

### Q What is the purpose of Child Care Check?

A Child Care Check is an online tool operated by DCYF to help caregivers search for quality child care. Parents, families, and others can find information about individual child care and early learning programs in Washington state. DCYF also is required to share the results of monitoring and health and safety inspection reports of all eligible and licensed child care providers on Child Care Check per federal requirements at 45 CFR 98.33 (<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-45/subtitle-A/subchapter-A/part-98/subpart-D/section-98.33>).

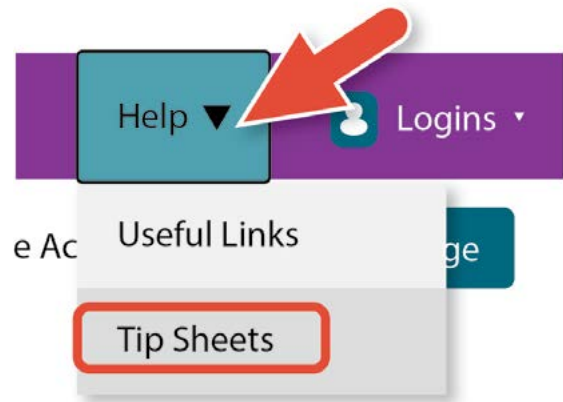
### Q Are provider addresses displayed in Child Care Check?

A By default, a provider's city and zip code are only shown for Family Home Providers. WA Initiative 1501 ([https://www2.sos.wa.gov/assets/elections/initiatives/finaltext\\_1024.pdf](https://www2.sos.wa.gov/assets/elections/initiatives/finaltext_1024.pdf)) prevents DCYF from sharing full addresses of Family Home Providers unless the provider opts in to display their full address. For other licensed child care (centers, Outdoor Nature-Based, and school-age), full addresses are displayed on Child Care Check.



### Q How can child care providers update the information displayed in Child Care Check?

A Instructions for providers to update some of the information displayed in Child Care Check can be found in the Provider Portal Tip Sheets under the Help tab. If you need assistance with the Provider Portal, please contact your licensor.



Below are some tip sheets you may find helpful.

- To opt in or out of showing the full address for Family Home Providers in Child Care Check: **Opting In Family Home Address:**
  - Log into the WA Compass Provider Portal (<https://dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/wacompass-login.pdf>)
  - Click on Child Care Check Info Tab
  - Click in the box to uncheck the “Show address on Child Care Check” box.
  - Click the green Update button to save.
- To add or update language, website, and certification information on display in Child Care Check: **Adding and Updating Information to Display on Child Care Check**
- To update hours of operation in Child Care Check: **Changing Your Schedule**
- To add available/open slots for Child Care Check: **Adding Available Slots to display on Child Care Check**



**Q In addition to MERIT and Child Care Check, what other Washington state systems have the addresses of child care facilities listed?**

**A** DCYF maintains internal licensing records with addresses for regulatory purposes. Child care providers receiving state and federal funds will be listed in non-DCYF systems which include, but may not be limited to, the Office of Financial Management (OFM) State Spending website (<https://fiscal.wa.gov/Spending/Checkbook>), Statewide Vendor Lookup website (<https://ofm.wa.gov/tech-support/statewide-vendor-payee-services/statewide-vendor-number-lookup/>), and WaTech's Open Data Portal (<https://data.wa.gov/>). Not all these sites publicize addresses of all child care facilities. As a private business, your information may appear in other systems that DCYF may not be aware of.

Data maintained in MERIT and WA Compass is not readily available to the public without a public disclosure request, but some data such as licensing and facility information, and Early Achievers participation status is displayed in Child Care Check.

**Q What steps can DCYF take when there is credible evidence that Child Care Check or complaint mechanisms are being misused to target providers based on protected characteristics?**

**A** DCYF is committed to equitable treatment of all licensed providers and condemns any discrimination, harassment, or misuse of agency systems or processes. When credible evidence suggests misuse of tools like Child Care Check or complaint mechanisms targeting providers based on protected characteristics, DCYF will coordinate with the Attorney General's Office, including referring potential hate crimes and incidents of bias, as well as cooperating with any law enforcement investigation.

Child Care Check is designed to assist families in finding quality licensed care and promote transparency in compliance with Washington state public disclosure laws. DCYF is not responsible for any misuse of publicly available information by third parties.

**Q How does DCYF distinguish between good-faith complaints and retaliatory or coordinated reports intended to intimidate providers? What internal review, escalation, or flagging processes exist?**

**A** DCYF and partners review all complaints and reports of potential fraud related to payment. We review for validity and prioritize reports for follow-up based on the evidence, allegation, and information reported. DCYF reviews all complaints regarding licensed child care providers. We investigate a complaint if it alleges a licensing violation or rises to the level of child abuse or neglect. If a person repeatedly reports child abuse or neglect in a way that appears to be harassment, we may issue a warning against false reports per RCW 26.44.061 (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=26.44.061>).

Anyone who suspects child care subsidy fraud should report it by calling 1-800-562-6906 or by using the Office of Fraud and Accountability | DSHS online reporting tool (<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/ffa/office-fraud-and-accountability>). DCYF takes these reports seriously and coordinates with the Office of Fraud and Accountability (within the Department of Social and Health Services) to ensure taxpayers' dollars are not being misused.

**Q How does DCYF administer Child Care Check in alignment with its equity and anti-discrimination commitments, particularly for immigrant, refugee, and providers of color who already experience disproportionate scrutiny?**

**A** DCYF is committed to equitable treatment of all licensed providers and condemns any discrimination, harassment, or misuse of agency systems or processes. Federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) rules require states to maintain a consumer education website with a searchable list of providers. DCYF meets this requirement, in part, through operating Child Care Check. Provider information provided to the public on Child Care Check includes the elements listed on the Child Care Check webpage (<https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-childcare/child-care-check>). Certain information is protected by law and not available to the public, including identifying information of licensed family home providers. Information is provided irrespective of race, religion, gender, sexual identity consistent with federal and state law and DCYF's equity and anti-discrimination commitments.

**Q What changes can DCYF make to the public-facing messaging on Child Care Check to clarify what information is displayed and the intended purpose of that information?**

**A** The information displayed on Child Care Check and its intended purpose can be located on the Child Care Check webpage (<https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-childcare/child-care-check>). DCYF is looking into further messaging to clarify this, including possible disclaimers on the purpose of Child Care Check.

**Q Will DCYF issue immediate guidance acknowledging misuse and harassment and clarifying that Child Care Check and complaint systems are for good-faith safety concerns, not coordinated targeting? Will it indicate that harassment, retaliatory reporting, or racially motivated misuse is taken seriously and subject to internal review?**

**A** Child Care Check is designed to assist families in finding quality licensed care and promote transparency, in compliance with Washington state public disclosure laws. DCYF is not responsible for any misuse of publicly available information by third parties. DCYF is looking into further messaging to clarify this, including possible disclaimers on the purpose of Child Care Check.

**Q Will DCYF publicly condemn harassment and racially targeted misuse of transparency systems? Will DCYF reaffirm the value of all early care and education providers?**

**A** DCYF is committed to equitable treatment of all licensed providers and condemns any discrimination, harassment, or misuse of agency systems or processes. DCYF reaffirms the value of the extraordinary providers serving families and children every day and its commitment to partnering with them to increase access to safe, high quality early care and education. Below are links to communications released to date:

- Message to Child Care Providers Regarding Federal Funding and Provider Safety (<https://dcyf.wa.gov/news/message-child-care-providers-regarding-federal-funding-and-provider-safety-espanol-soomaali>)
- Message for Child Care Providers in Response to Ongoing Media Coverage (<https://dcyf.wa.gov/news/message-child-care-providers-response-ongoing-media-coverage-english-espanol-soomaali-francais>)
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Child Care Check is designed to assist families in finding quality licensed care and promote transparency, in compliance with Washington state public disclosure laws. DCYF is not responsible for any misuse of publicly available information by third parties.

## Subsidy and Overpayments

**Q How should providers respond if members of the public raise concerns or allegations about fraud?**

**A** The primary responsibility of providers is the safety and well-being of the children in their care. Providers are not required to discuss allegations, program details, or subsidies with members of the public.

Anyone who suspects child care subsidy fraud should report it by calling 1-800-562-6906 or by using the Office of Fraud and Accountability | DSHS online reporting tool (<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/ffa/office-fraud-and-accountability>). DCYF takes these reports seriously and coordinates with the Office of Fraud and Accountability (Department of Social and Health Services) to ensure taxpayers' dollars are not being misused.

**Q What is DCYF's process for payments and auditing of child care subsidy programs?**

**A** DCYF's Child Care Subsidy Program Overpayment Report (<https://dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/reports/child-care-subsidy-program-overpayment-2025.pdf>) provides details on this process, as well as data on overpayments. For the child care subsidy program, DCYF pays providers after services have been provided. Providers receive a monthly invoice, and they claim payment based on the services they provided and are eligible to receive.

DCYF conducts both random and focused audits of family eligibility decisions, provider authorizations, and provider payments. Audits of provider payments include review of attendance and other records to verify they match families authorized to receive subsidy benefits.

**Q How can a child care provider show they are fiscally responsible for the state/federal funds they receive such as child care subsidy or early learning grants?**

**A** Per WAC 110-300-0455 (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx/default.aspx?cite=110-300-0455>) providers are required to keep child care attendance records. Providers are also required to keep receipts and accurate records of spending for grant funds (Child Care Complex Needs Fund, ECEAP Complex Needs, Equity Grants, and Needs-Based Grants) received.

**Q Who is legally authorized to investigate child care providers for licensing or subsidy compliance?**

**A** *DCYF's Licensing Division, Child Protective Services (LD CPS) is legally authorized to investigate child care providers for allegations of child abuse or neglect. Child Care Licensing at DCYF is authorized to investigate allegations of licensing rule violations.*

*Regarding subsidy compliance, DCYF collaborates with partner agencies, including the Department of Social and Health Services Office of Fraud and Accountability, who review all complaints and reports of potential fraud related to payment. We review for validity and prioritize reports for follow-up based on the evidence, allegation, and information reported.*

*Only authorized government agencies and officials are legally empowered to investigate licensed child care providers for compliance with licensing standards or subsidy programs. These agencies and their roles include, but may not be limited to, the following:*

- *DCYF investigates child care licensing and program oversight.*
- *The Department of Social and Health Services Office of Fraud and Accountability manages reports of child care subsidy-related fraud.*
- *The Washington State Auditor's Office may investigate or audit certain financial matters.*
- *Local law enforcement and prosecutors may investigate when criminal activity is suspected.*

