



Title	Fee Policy & Procedure
Date Last Reviewed	29 February 2016
Date of Next Review	July 2017
Approved By	Alpine Children's Services Board of Management
Owner	General Manager
Version	6
Purpose or Reason	Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
Source or Reference Material	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Childcare Services Handbook, DET Handbook 2012• Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011

VERSION CONTROL

Version No.	Date	Comment	Author
1	Feb 2004	Created to ensure a clear set of guidelines regarding fees	Manager
2	Jan 2013	Amended to include arrangements at the new service - Alpine View Children's Centre	Manager
3	Nov 2014	Reviewed and reformatted by ACS Board for consistency	ACS Board
4	29 June 2015	Expanded the policy statement to reference the parity and equity across ACS and the philosophy of equity and inclusion. Expanded the section on Exceptional Circumstances to include a section on Special Child Care Benefits and ACS fee exemption.	ACS GM & Board
5	29 Feb 2016	Amended to allow flexibility of fees when a child is settling in, to ensure all accounts are paid in full by the end of each calendar year and to clarify holiday arrangements. Removed detailed references to any Federal or State programs or regulatory guidelines. Simplified the 'Independent Fee Setting for Family Day Care' section.	ACS GM & Board
6	13 Nov 2017	Included payment options for Bright Outside School Hours Care & Tawonga Kindergarten Updated process for paying by cheque at Lake View Children's Centre Updated the debt collection procedure and included a flow chart for debt collection Amended reference to Special Child Care Benefit to Federal DET Fee Relief Included a rescheduling fee Included details about the fees for the 4YO Kindergarten Programs provided at Alpine View Children's Centre and Lake View Children's Centre	General Manager

Policy

Scope

The Policy and Procedure applies to all Alpine Children's Services (ACS) staff, ACS Board of Management (Board), Family Day Care Educators, parents/guardians, children, volunteers, students and contractors involved with the service.

Policy Statement

Fees are calculated each year in a budget approved by the ACS Board. Every effort is maintained to provide affordable early childhood education and care for families. Fees are invoiced weekly and families are expected to pay weekly or fortnightly (unless otherwise agreed).

To ensure parity and equity for all families within the Alpine Shire, ACS has a flat fee structure for all services and ages i.e. there is no difference in fees between ACS centres or children under / over 3 years old.

Our philosophy underpins our approach to equal access to all families based on the principles of equity and inclusion. Therefore in exceptional circumstances, ACS may consider full fee exemptions on either a short or long term basis.

Objectives/Principles

To provide a clear set of guidelines for the setting, payment and collection of fees, which ensure the viability of the service and the equitable and non-discriminatory application of fees across the programs provided.

Procedure

Enrolment Fee

An enrolment fee of \$10 is charged for all new families to cover the cost of the administration of new enrolments.

Fee Payment Agreement Form

All families must complete and sign a Fee Payment Agreement Form which outlines the fees to be paid and conditions for payment, prior to the child commencing at the service.

Settling In Period

ACS understands that some children (particularly younger children) may not cope with a full session/s when they are new / “settling into” an ACS Centre for the first time or after a long absence. Where a child only attends for a short period (< 5-hours) as part of settling into an ACS Centre, settling in sessions will be charged at an hourly rate (as detailed in the current ACS Fee Schedule).

Hourly rates, for settling in sessions, will typically be applicable for two (2) to three (3) sessions only and must be agreed between the ACS Team Leader (or General Manager) and families to enable ACS to manage bookings, availability, staff to child ratios and staffing rosters.

Families are strongly encouraged to discuss any potential settling in concerns with their Centre’s Team Leader (or ACS’s General Manager) and to visit the ACS Centre as much as possible with their child/ren prior to the child commencing any childcare or kindergarten programs.

Payment of accounts

Accounts are issued weekly and fees must be paid on a weekly basis (unless otherwise agreed in writing with the ACS General Manager). Fees will be invoiced to families directly and must be paid by the date indicated on the invoice. Each invoice will be accompanied by payment instructions.

Families experiencing difficulties making fee payments should contact the Administration Officer or the ACS General Manager to discuss payment options as soon as possible

Full fees are charged for each day that the program is in operation unless the child’s position is permanently cancelled. Public holidays do not incur fees.

All accounts must be paid in full at the end of each calendar year. Attendances cannot commence in the new calendar year until full payment has been received for the previous year’s account (unless otherwise agree in writing with the ACS General Manager).

Service Closure

In the event of an emergency that requires a service to close, families are required to pay their scheduled fee for that date.

Exclusions

In the event a child is directed to be excluded from the service (as per the Department of Health’s minimum period of exclusion), families are required to pay their scheduled fee for that day.

Cancellation

Families wishing to cancel their child's permanent / regular booking are required to give two week's notice in writing to the service. If written notice is not given, two weeks fees will be charged in lieu.

Re-scheduling Fee

A re-scheduling fee of \$20 will be charged for all families who cancel their child's booking and then recommence a booking within the same calendar year.

Casual Booking Fee

A fee applies to all casual bookings of \$3 per session.

Bond / advance payment of fees

ACS reserves the right to charge families a bond (of the equivalent of 2-weeks fees or \$100) or charge fees in advance where the family has had previous outstanding or unpaid fees with ACS.

Any bond or requirement to pay fees in advanced will be at the discretion of the ACS General Manager and will be agreed with the family prior to their child/ren being re-enrolled at an ACS centre or service.

Holidays

ACS does not provide any waivers or discounts for child absences when a family is on holiday (due to the ongoing costs of permanent staffing) therefore full fees are charged for these absences.

Cancellation of a child's permanent booking due to a family holiday is made at the risk of not being able to resume the child's booking upon return i.e. bookings are not held during these absences if cancelled by the family.

3YO and 4YO Kindergarten Programs Bookings

ACS provides 3YO and 4YO Kindergarten Programs at Alpine View Children's Centre and Lake View Children's Centre. These programs operate in line with the Victorian Department of Education & Training school terms.

Families may elect to enrol their child at Alpine View Children's Centre and Lake View Children's Centre for the:

- 3YO or 4YO Kindergarten Program for the school terms only; *OR*
- 3YO or 4YO Kindergarten Program for the school terms plus long day care during school holiday periods.

Families who elect to enrol their child for school terms only may request casual bookings during school holiday periods. These bookings will be subject to availability and will incur a casual booking fee.

4YO Kindergarten Program Fees

Fees for the 4YO Kindergarten Programs provided at Alpine View Children's Centre and Lake View Children's Centre are subsidised through funding from the Victorian Department of Education & Training. Families will be charged long day care fees during school holiday periods when the 4YO Kindergarten Program is not in operation.

Review of Fees

The ACS Board of Management reviews all fees, typically annually, as part of the annual ACS budget setting process. Any fee increases are usually implemented at the start of the financial year in conjunction with the increase to Centrelink's base rate that we use to calculate families out-of-pocket expenses, thereby minimising the impact of the fee increase.

Families will be provided with a minimum of two week's notice of any fee increases.

ACS may review and change the fees during the year if the financial viability of an individual program or the service is at risk.

Late Fees

First Time: A warning and a once-off fee of \$10 will apply for the first time a child is collected up to ten minutes late from his/her session. If a child is collected more than ten minutes late from his/her session regular late fees will apply.

Regular Late Fees: When a child is collected up to five minutes late from his/her session, a late fee of \$10 will apply. A further \$10 per child will be charged for each additional one (1) minute thereafter. This applies to all sessions (childcare and kindergarten). It should be further noted that late fees will be charged even when one child is collected on time but a sibling in another room is collected **late** from his/her session.

Debt Collection Process

If fees are not paid within 14-days of the invoice being issued, the Administration Officer or nominated person will:

1. Charge a late payment fee of \$10 and issue a reminder notice stating fees are overdue, giving five working days for payment. The reminder notice will advise families if they are experiencing financial hardship to contact the Administration Officer or the OSHC Lead Educator or the Centre / Service Coordinator or the ACS General Manager to discuss payment options as soon as possible.
2. When a family is experiencing financial hardship, ACS will discuss options that may include fee relief from the Federal Department of Education & Training and / or a payment plan. ACS may request evidence of financial hardship such as an employment separation certificate or medical certificate.
3. If payment has not been received within 7-days of the reminder notice being issued families will be advised that the debt will be sent to a formal debt collection agency and their booking will be cancelled effective immediately.

Refer to page 9 for the Debt Collection Process Flowchart

Exceptional Circumstances - Government Fee Relief

The Federal Department of Education & Training (DET) offers fee relief to provide extra assistance with childcare fees. Fee relief can be granted to assist families experiencing a hardship event that significantly reduces their ability to pay the child care fees normally charged, while they adapt to their new circumstances. ACS will support families with all applications of fee relief.

Exceptional Circumstances - Fee Exemption

ACS recognises that there may be a situation where a family may be ineligible for Government fee relief and unable to pay fees. Furthermore, in these circumstances a child may best be supported by attending an early childhood service.

In these exceptional circumstances the General Manager (GM) has the authority to consider a full fee exemption on either a short or long term basis. The GM will document the details of the fee exemption and provide an overview to the ACS Board. The privacy and confidentiality of the family will be maintained at all times.

ACS also reserves the right to consider the following options as choices for negotiating unpaid fees: community assistance, grants from service clubs and/or barter - there may be the option to negotiate the carrying out of work around the centre, grounds maintenance, sewing etc, in place of all or part of the fees.

Exceptional Circumstances - Waiving Cancellation Notice

The two week cancellation notice may be waived under exceptional circumstances such as significant illness of a child at the discretion of the General Manager.

Methods of payment

There are a number of potential issues/risks with cash payments including misplacement, theft and fraud. Therefore, ACS does not accept any cash payments.

Payment plans, where fees are paid in instalments, are available and must be negotiated directly with ACS.

Families may pay by cheque (payable to Alpine Children's Services) by posting to Alpine Children's Services, PO Box 651, Bright VIC 3741.

Lake View Children's Centre

Payment can be made on-line by BPAY or cheque (payable to Alpine Children's Services). If paying by cheque in person please put payment into a payment envelope and give to the Centre Coordinator or Administration Officer.

Mountain View Children's Centre

Payments can be made on-line by BPAY or cheque (payable to Alpine Children's Services). If paying by cheque in person please put payment into a payment envelope and place in the red fee collection box located in the front administration office at the glass sliding windows.

Alpine View Children's Centre

Payments can be made on-line by BPAY or cheque (payable to Alpine Children's Services). If paying by cheque in person please put payment into a payment envelope and place in the fee collection box at the front desk.

Myrtleford and Bright Outside School Hours Care, Alpine Family Day Care & Tawonga Kindergarten

Payments can be made on-line by BPAY or cheque (payable to Alpine Children's Services).

Family Day Care Fees

Educators working for Alpine Family Day Care (FDC) are able to set their own fees. FDC Educators discuss their proposed fees with either the FDC Team Leader or ACS General Manager prior to communicating the fee schedule to families. FDC fee considerations include:

- Educator's qualification;
- Educational program;
- Current ACS Fees; and
- Geographical location of the service.

FDC fees are charged for:

- Each day that the FDC service is in operation (and the child has a permanent booking on that day) unless the child's position is permanently cancelled;
- Public holidays (at the public holiday rate); and
- All child absences.

If the FDC service is closed then fees are not charged.

ACS Debt Collection Process

