



Title	Fee Policy & Procedure
Date of Approval	February 2004
Date Last Reviewed	February 2016
Date of Next Review	July 2017
Approved By	Alpine Children's Services Board of Management
Owner	General Manager
Version	5
Purpose or Reason	Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
Source or Reference Material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Childcare Services Handbook, DET Handbook 2012</li><li>• Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011</li></ul>

## 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	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	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

## **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 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/Principals**

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 or fortnightly 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.

## **Administration Fee**

An administration 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.

## **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.

## **Outstanding Fees**

If fees are not paid by the due date the Administration Officer or nominated person will:

1. Issue a reminder notice stating fees are overdue, giving five working days for payment.
2. Follow up the reminder with a telephone call within five working days of the expiry date of the reminder notice, if payment has not been received by the specified date. If the family is having difficulty paying, a meeting can be arranged to discuss alternate payment options and to develop an agreed payment plan.

3. If payment has not been received, or an agreed payment plan has not been drawn up, ACS will issue a second and final demand for full payment within five working days. Families will be advised that if this payment is not made there will no longer be a place available at the service for the child.
4. If the payment has not been received the debt will be sent to a formal debt collection agency and the child/ren's bookings will be cancelled until all outstanding monies are paid or a payment plan is put in place.

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

### **Exceptional Circumstances - Special CCB**

The Federal Department of Education & Training (DET) offers Special Child Care Benefit (SCCB) to provide extra assistance with childcare fees, up to the full amount of the usual fee charged by the Child Care Benefit Approved Child Care Service Provider. SCCB 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 SCCB and is able to internally grant families 13 weeks of SCCB (in any given financial year) with supporting evidence.

### **Exceptional Circumstances - Fee Exemption**

ACS recognises that there may be a situation where a family may be ineligible for SCCB 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.

### ***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 please put payment into a payment envelope and place in the gold slotted fee collection box located in the front administration office below the glass sliding windows. Payments may also be posted to Alpine Children's Services, PO Box 175, and Mt Beauty 3699.

### *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 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. Payments may also be posted to may also be posted to Alpine Children's Services, PO Box 692, Myrtleford 3737

### *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 please put payment into a payment envelope and place in the fee collection box at the front desk. Payments may also be posted to Alpine Children's Services, P.O Box 651, Bright 3741.

### *Myrtleford Outside School Hours Care*

Payments can be made on-line by BPAY or cheque (payable to Alpine Children's Services). If paying by cheque please post to Alpine Children's Services, P.O Box 651, Bright 3741.

### *Alpine Family Day Care*

Payments can be made on-line by BPAY or cheque (payable to Alpine Children's Services). If paying by cheque please post to Alpine Children's Services, P.O Box 651, Bright 3741.

### **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.