



Welcome

In this newsletter, I have summarised the essential information you need to know about absences into one page. It can be a very complex area, so this may not answer every question that could arise, but it should be sufficient for the most common situations. I have also included an explanation of why families may be finding it difficult to reach the Family Assistance Office at this time of year.

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Calling the Family Assistance Office

At the Helpdesk, we have had many calls recently from services letting us know that parents are having trouble getting through to the FAO on their 13 6150 number.

Busy time of year

We are right in the middle of the FAO's busiest time of the year. Every year, call volumes increase dramatically between July and September and the FAO has engaged a significant number of extra staff to help manage this demand. This year, the demand is even higher than expected.

The calls increase at this time of year because a number of things happen at the same time, including:

- Reconciliation of family entitlements
- Advance payments of Family Tax Benefit
- Budget measures
- Lump sum claims for family assistance
- Letters to families about their payments

What can families do?

Consider using the FAO's online services at www.familyassist.gov.au. Families can find information on the website to answer many of their questions, check their details and update their records. There are many functions that families can do online, such as:

- View child care details and payments
- Claim Child Care Benefit
- Update work, training or study details
- Update schooling details

If a call can't be avoided, try calling after 6.00 pm local time. The call centre is open from 8am – 8pm, Monday – Friday.



Absences at a glance

With the start of the new financial year in July, the absence count for all children has been reset to zero, so this is a good time to remind you about the treatment of absences for CCB purposes.

If you want to read more on this subject, the CCMS Quick Guide (desktop flip chart) includes a flow chart to show the decision-making process for absences and the Child Care Service Handbook has a whole chapter about absences.

Background

Child care services usually charge fees for booked sessions of care, whether or not the child attends the session. Child Care Benefit can also be paid for a reasonable number of absences.

There are some basic requirements that always apply to absences. CCB is only paid if the absence is on a day:

- the child would normally attend care, and
- you have charged a fee, and
- the service is operating and care is available if required (apart from public holidays).

Initial 42 days

CCB is paid for a child's first 42 absences each financial year. There are no restrictions on the reasons for these initial absences and there is no requirement for supporting documentation.

Additional Absences

If a child uses all 42 initial absence days, they can have access to more absence days only if they are taken for certain reasons. For some of these reasons you need supporting documentation, such as a doctor's certificate in the case of illness. The table below shows the additional absence reasons and whether they require documentation.

Documentation is required for ...	Documentation is not required for ...
Illness of the child* or a member of their household	Temporary school closure or pupil-free day
Outbreak of infectious disease for which the child is not immunised	Period of local emergency
Parent's rostered days off or rotating shifts*	Attendance at preschool
Shared care arrangements*	Exceptional circumstances

Exceptional circumstances

The term 'exceptional circumstances' is easily misunderstood. It refers to the situation where a child has already used at least 31 of their initial 42 absences for the reasons shown in the table with a star (*). If you have the required evidence for those original absences, you can approve up to 20 more absences as 'exceptional circumstance additional absence days'. These extra days can be used for a break in care and no further documentation is needed from the family.

Public holidays

Initial absences can be used for public holidays if you have charged a fee, even though the service is closed. If a child's 42 initial absence days have all been used and the child qualifies for an additional absence (see table above), it can be used on a public holiday. **A public holiday is not an additional absence reason.**



But wait, there's more ...

- * Absence rules apply to all service types except Occasional Care.
- * Absences are counted across all services used by the child.
- * FDC Scheme is considered 'open' if they have an alternative carer available.
- * Only one absence is counted if a child is absent from more than one session on a single day (e.g. before and after school care).
- * You can't report absences if you close for a staff training day or child-free day at your service.
- * You can't report absences before a child attends care at your service.
- * You can't report absences after a child's last day of attendance at your service.
- * Unused initial absences can't be carried over from one financial year to the next.