

**CHILD DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM FEE POLICIES  
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS  
SCHOOL YEAR (SY) 2008-2009**

1. QUESTION: How has the fee policy changed from last year?

ANSWER: The fee policy has not changed from last year.

2. QUESTION: How are the fees determined?

ANSWER: The fees are set to pay approximately half of the total cost of providing the care. The Military Child Care Acts of 1989/1996 directed that parents pay approximately half of the cost of care. The fees are set high enough only to cover the costs not paid for by the taxpayers. In the child development centers, parent fees pay for only three-fourths of the caregivers' wages and benefits, some consumable supplies, and the costs of the food program not paid for by reimbursements from the United States Department of Agriculture. In the school age program parent fees are used only for the wages and benefits of the school age staff who work directly with children.

3. QUESTION: Why are parents charged for the weeks that their children are not present because the parents are on leave?

ANSWER: Parents must pay for the child care space they are reserving even if their child is not present because the program's costs of making that space available, whether it is used or not, do not decrease. Having one or more children absent does not decrease the cost of providing staff for the room and that is what the fees collected from parents are used to pay. The annual fee for use of the child development center is the fee that each child's parent would pay multiplied by 52 (weeks). The fees are set high enough to cover the nonappropriated costs of operating the program only if they are collected for 52 weeks of the year. Parents are required to pay for 52 weeks; however, they may pay the total annual fee in 52 (weekly) or 24 (semi monthly) payments.

4. QUESTION: Why do parents have to pay for child care when their child is sick?

ANSWER: The program's costs of operating the center do not decrease when one or more children are absent in a room. Unless at least half of the children are absent, the same number of staff must be present to ensure the health and safety of the children. The fees collected from parents are used to pay the caregiving staff and those costs do not decrease because of the absence of a few children.

5. QUESTION: Why do higher income parents have to subsidize the care of lower income parents?

ANSWER: Higher income parents do not subsidize the child care of lower income families. All parents' child care is subsidized; however the care of the lower income parents is being subsidized more than that of higher income parents.

6. QUESTION: Why are the fees based on total household income?

ANSWER: Rather than basing the fees on military rank, the fees are based on a family's ability to pay. Total family income is a better yardstick through which to measure ability to pay since it takes into consideration all income available to pay the child care bill. One of the purposes of the military child care program is to improve the economic viability of military families. Those families with the lowest incomes are those most in need of assistance with their child care expenses.

7. QUESTION: It's not fair for higher income families to have to pay more for child care.

ANSWER: Although higher income families pay more in actual dollars for their child care, they pay a lower percentage of their income for child care. Since one of the primary purposes of Congress providing taxpayer funds to help reduce the cost of child care for military families is to improve the economic viability of these families, the care of lower income members is subsidized more than that of higher income families. Note: The base may provide a chart showing the percent that each income category is paying for child care

8. QUESTION: Why are the child care fees about the same at all Air Force bases even though the cost of living is different from area to area?

ANSWER: The fee ranges for child care are the same regardless of location because the fees pay the caregivers' wages and the wage rates for caregivers are the same at all bases (GS-02 to GS-05). Additionally, military pay is the same at all bases and the military member's pay is the primary source of income for most military families. If the rates were based on the local cost of living, military members would be paying very high child care fees in some locations, such as Washington DC, Los Angeles, Boston, etc. because local child care fees are very high in those areas. Overall, it is better for families and for recruiting and retaining caregivers to have the wages similar and, therefore, the fees the same across the Air Force.

9. QUESTION: Why are the fees at off-base centers cheaper in some areas?

ANSWER: There are several reasons why the fees at some off-base centers may be lower than at the Air Force child development center or school age program. Many off-base centers do not provide infant and toddler care or, if they do, provide only a few spaces for these age groups. These age groups are the most expensive to provide care for because one caregiver can care for fewer children. Most Air Force centers devote up to half (or more) of their spaces to these age groups, therefore, the overall cost of operating is higher. Secondly, fees in off-base centers may

be lower because the off-base fees do not include meals and snacks. Thirdly, staff:child ratios (the number of children for whom one caregiver can provide care) is different. In many states, the number of children per caregiver is much higher than the Air Force considers necessary to provide good care for children. Additionally, off-base centers may pay very low wages and not be concerned about high staff turnover; some off-base centers pay minimum wage and have very high staff turnover.

The Air Force believes it is important for children to be taken care of by the same caregiver from day-to-day. The caregiver gets to know the children and can establish an emotional bond with them and be more aware of when they are coming down with a potentially life-threatening illness. Paying caregivers enough to minimize staff turnover reduces the amount the Air Force has to spend recruiting, screening, and training caregivers and saves the Air Force money in the long run.

10. QUESTION: Why isn't there a reduction for the second child in the family?

ANSWER: The Air Force doesn't offer a reduction for the second, third, etc. child in the family because it costs just as much to take care of the second or third child in a family as it does the first. If a reduction were offered to families with two or more children, families with one child would have to pay more to make up the reduction offered to the families with two or more children. Usually the second or third child in a family is an infant and toddler and the cost of providing care for children in this age group is higher than for children in the preschool age group.

11. QUESTION: If caring for an infant or toddler costs more, why doesn't the Air Force charge parents who have infants and toddlers more than they charge parents who have preschoolers?

ANSWER: Although the Air Force does not prohibit bases from charging more for infants and toddlers, most don't. Parents with infants and toddlers are usually those with the lower incomes and are those less able to pay higher fees. Since all children pass through these age groups, over the enrollment of the child in the Air Force center it "evens out"; parents of infants and toddlers pay less than they could be charged when their children are in these age groups; and more than they could be charged when their children are preschoolers. Having the fees the same regardless of age group is easier for Air Force families and reduces the center's administrative costs.

12. QUESTION: Why does child care cost so much?

ANSWER: Child care is an expensive service to purchase because it is labor intensive, especially, when infants and toddlers are being provided care. Over 50% of the total cost of providing child care and 95% of the cost paid by parents is for caregivers. The child care fees include 10 meals and 10 snacks per week. The actual cost of the child care part of the fees (not counting the value of the meals and snacks) is less than \$1.75 per hour for most families and less than \$2.50 per hour for those paying the very highest fees. The value of the food provided exceeds \$18 per week per child.

13. QUESTION: Wouldn't it be cheaper for parents if the Air Force offered custodial care instead of developmental care?

ANSWER: The costs paid by the parents are for the caregivers' wages, benefits and training. The caregivers have to be present to provide the basic care of the children--to feed them, change diapers, take them to the toilet, evacuate them in emergencies, comfort them, guide them in their interactions with other children, etc. The same number of caregivers is required whether the Air Force offers custodial or developmental care. Unless the Air Force pays equivalent to GS-02/05 to caregivers it cannot recruit and retain individuals to provide child care. The difference between custodial care and developmental care is in how the caregivers interact with the children and the toys and activities that are offered to the children. It is the Air Force's position that it is better for Air Force families and for the Air Force if the caregivers interact with the children using positive guidance techniques and read to the children and conduct other learning activities with them. The additional cost of ensuring the caregivers use positive guidance techniques and offer learning activities to the children is not paid by the parents and is less than 8% of the total cost of child care.

14. QUESTION: Why does it cost more if a parent is late picking up a child or needs more than 10 hours care per day?

ANSWER: Most Air Force child development centers require additional payment if a child is left longer than 10 hours or the parent arrives to pick up the child after closing time. The reason that they do so is because when parents do not pick their child up within the allotted time, additional staff have to be kept on duty and this staff may have to be paid overtime. To keep costs as low as possible, most centers staff the program with the minimum number of staff permitted by Air Force policies. If children are left for more than 10 hours, they need to be served a third meal or snack because they are hungry (children have small stomachs and need to be fed every three hours). This adds to the cost of operating the center and increases the costs for all parents.

15. QUESTION: Why does family child care cost more than the child development center?

ANSWER: Family Child Care (FCC) providers are private businesses licensed by the Air Force to provide child care using government quarters on Air Force bases. As private businesses they establish their own fees and charges; their fees and charges are not established or controlled by the Air Force. The Air Force tries to help minimize the cost of FCC and improve its quality by providing the equipment and supplies needed by the FCC providers and offering them free training. Where it is available, the Air Force encourages FCC providers to enroll in the USDA Child and Adult Food Program so that they can be reimbursed for a portion of the cost of the meals and snacks they provide. Many of our bases now have Air Force-subsidized FCC. Subsidized FCC is offered at most installations with large waiting lists, high costs for infant and toddler care, and the need for substantial spaces for shift workers or children with special needs. At these sites, parents using a subsidized FCC home will pay the same basic weekly fee as they would if they were in the base child development center.