

# Early Learning Background Check FAQ

## Who must have background checks?

Individuals who work, volunteer, reside or have unsupervised access to children in an early learning or child care setting must complete a background check.

This includes individuals who:

- Currently have a background clearance and are seeking to renew the authorization.
- Are seeking a background check authorization for the first time.

A background clearance authorizes subject individuals to:

- Work at a child care agency.
- Care for children receiving early learning services.
- Reside on the premises of a child care agency or certified facility.
- Care for children in the child's or provider's home, including family, friends, and neighbors (FFN) or in-home/relative care providers.
- Have unsupervised access to children receiving early learning services, including those not directly caring for children but work or volunteer on the premises.

For other helpful information, please visit: <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/early-learning-providers/background-checks>.

## What does a background check include?

National background checks:

- National FBI Fingerprint Criminal History Check
- NCIC National Sex Offender Registry Check

Current state of residence checks:

- In-State Fingerprint Criminal History Check
- In-State Sex Offender Registry Check
- In-State Child Abuse and Neglect Registry Check

State(s) where the individual has resided within the previous five years:

- Interstate Criminal History Check
- Interstate Sex Offender Registry Check



Washington State Department of  
**CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**

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- Interstate Child Abuse and Neglect Registry Check

[DHHS CCDBG Background Check Requirements](#) - provides an overview of federal background check components and requirements for childcare and early learning applicants.

Background checks are required prior to employment and at least every five years. Background checks should meet a standard 45-day or less turnaround time.

### Which early learning or child care settings are subject to the background check requirements?

- Licensed family home early learning programs
- Licensed child care center early learning programs
- Licensed school-age programs
- License-exempt in-home/relative providers eligible to receive WCCC
- Licensed outdoor Nature-Based Child Care Programs

### What is considered “unsupervised access”?

Per [WAC 110-06-0020](#): “Unsupervised access” is defined as “not in the presence of a subject individual who is an employee of a child care agency and is authorized by DCYF to be alone with children receiving early learning services from the same agency. For purposes of this definition, unsupervised access includes, but is not limited to, access to children receiving early learning services who are not within constant visual or auditory range of the individual authorized by DCYF to be alone with children receiving early learning services.”

### If an applicant’s background check clearance is suspended due to an investigation by Child Protective Services (CPS) or Licensing Division (LD), can they still work, volunteer, live in the home or have unsupervised access with children in an early learning or child care program?

No. A suspended background check means their clearance is no longer valid pending the outcome of the investigation or suitability assessment. This is true even if the person was previously cleared.

### Do overnight houseguests need a cleared Portable Background Check (PBC)? If so, what is the stay duration that would trigger need for PBC?

Yes, if they will have unsupervised access to children in early learning care.

### Can an applicant start immediately, and work supervised until their background check clears?

Fingerprints must be completed and cleared prior to starting work. Any new child care staff,

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applicants, or volunteers may be on the premises if not in licensed child care space and not counted in ratio, not interacting with or unsupervised with children. This includes interviews, training, and hiring new staff. This would also include individuals engaging in classroom observation as a component of the interview process, and the individual being interviewed is not considered employed or hired.

## How does an early learning applicant apply for a Portable Background Check (PBC)?

Applicants should visit the following link for instructions to create a MERIT account, which is required to fill out a PBC application: [MERIT Workforce Registry | Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#).

Friends and Family Network (FFN) providers should visit the following link: [Family, Friend, and Neighbor Providers | Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#).

## How does an applicant renew a PBC?

Background checks must be renewed every five years. A new fingerprint check must be completed at the time of renewal for applicants who previously fingerprinted and applicants who have not fingerprinted.

Applicants will receive a notification that it is time to renew their PBC with the following instructions:

1. Log in at [merit.dcyf.wa.gov](http://merit.dcyf.wa.gov).
2. Click on the “My Applications” tab.
3. Click on the blue link labeled “Portable Background Check Application”.
4. Complete and submit the application.

## How does an applicant fix employment information in the PBC application?

This does not impact the PBC, but the applicant will want to verify their current employment is correct in their MERIT Professional Record.

## How does an applicant add a current address into the PBC application in Step 3?

When adding address information in step 3 of the PBC application, the applicant must indicate which address is current by selecting the box labeled “Check box if this is your current address.” If this box is not checked, the applicant will not be able to proceed.

## How does an applicant add ID information if no state ID?

In the PBC application, if an applicant is not using a License or State ID, click on the “Non-Expired Gov ID Type” drop-down and choose the “None” option:

Government Issued ID (Example: Driver's License, Passport, etc.)

Non-Expired Gov ID Type

None

Washington License or State ID

Out of State License or State ID

None

State

Please Select

## How does an applicant print a copy of their PBC clearance?

1. Applicant must log in at [merit.dcyf.wa.gov](https://merit.dcyf.wa.gov).
2. Go to the "My Record" tab.
3. Go to the "Professional Record" sub tab.
4. Find the box labeled "Personal Data". In the box, you will see your date of birth. Underneath your date of birth, you will see your Portable Background Check information. Underneath that, you will see a blue link labeled "Click here to view and print your Portable Background Check Certificate". Please click on this link and you will be able to print out your certificate.

## What will disqualify me from working in Early Learning?

For a full list, please check out the [Secretary's List of Crimes and Negative Actions For Employees and Providers](#) which includes:

- Refusal to consent to a criminal background check or knowingly makes a materially false statement in connection to a criminal background check.
- Is registered, or is required to be registered, on a state sex offender registry or repository or the National Sex Offender Registry.
- Felony convictions consisting of:
  - Murder
  - Child abuse or neglect
  - A crime against children, including pornography
  - Spousal abuse
  - A crime involving rape or sexual assault
  - Kidnapping
  - Arson
  - Physical assault or battery
  - A drug related offense committed during the preceding five years
- Conviction of a violent misdemeanor committed as an adult against a child, including the following crimes: child abuse, child endangerment, and sexual assault, or of any misdemeanor involving child pornography.

## Can a disqualification be appealed?

Applicants who are disqualified based on a character, suitability, and competence assessment may request a review of the decision by emailing [DCYF.BackgroundCheck@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:DCYF.BackgroundCheck@dcyf.wa.gov). If they would prefer to appeal the decision, they may do so by requesting an appeal in writing to the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH). **Detailed instructions and instructions regarding the appeal process will be included in the certified letter that is mailed to applicants who are disqualified.**

## How often does an applicant need to get a fingerprint background done?

- The fingerprint check must be renewed every five years from the date of the previous clearance.
- Providers who separate from employment are required to complete a new background check regardless of time between separation and reapplication.
- Staff members who separate from employment from a child care provider within the state for 180 consecutive days.

## Where can I find the associated federal and state statutes and rules?

- [Child Care and Development Block Fund Grant Act](#) (CCDF) federal requirements are implemented in [RCW 43.216.270](#) and [WAC 110-06](#).
- [DHHS CCDBG Background Check Requirements](#) provides a helpful overview of the federal background check components and requirements for child care and early learning applicants.

## If I reside in another state and previously lived in Washington, where do I request a criminal background check, sex offender registry check and child abuse and neglect check?

- Criminal history background check: [Washington State Patrol website](#).
- Child Abuse Neglect check- phone: 1-800-998-3898 - select the prompt for CAN history checks or email: [CANhistorychecks@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:CANhistorychecks@dcyf.wa.gov).
- Sex offender registry check: <https://www.nsopw.gov/>.