

Early Drop-Off and Late Pick-Up

Family child care providers work very long hours caring for children. A national survey indicates that they care for children an average of eleven hours a day, or fifty-five hours a week. When you are working so many hours it can be very frustrating when clients drop off their children early or are late to pick them up. Providers around the country have come up with many different solutions to this problem.

First, it's important that your contract states that your regular fee covers a specific time during the day so it is clear if a client is early or late. Usually the most common way that providers deal with these situations is to charge a late fee (or early fee). It makes sense that you would charge for all the time that you are working. Often providers give parents a ten or fifteen-minute grace period at pick-up time before the late fee applies. Some providers have no grace period at all. One provider's contract says that if a client is ever late to pick up her child she is immediately terminated! When asked, she said that no client had ever been late. Most providers would not take such a drastic step.

Here are some examples of a late fee or other consequence when parents drop off early or pick up late:

- Client will pay \$0.50/\$1.00 per minute if child is dropped off earlier than scheduled or picked up later than scheduled.
- Client who notifies me of early drop off the night before will not have to pay an early drop off fee.
- Client who notifies me of a late pick up at least an hour before the scheduled pick up time will not have to pay a late pick up fee.
- Client will be allowed to drop off early or pick up late ___ times a year without charge. For all additional early drop offs or late pick ups there will be a fee of \$___ per minute.
- Client will be allowed to drop off early or pick up late ___ times a year without charge. If there are any additional early drop offs or late pick-ups our agreement will end.
- Provider is willing to provide care after the regular pick up time. The rate after the regular pick up time is \$___ per minute.
- Fees for early drop off or late pick up are due at the end of the day.

Time versus Money

Even with a late fee in their contract, many providers feel uncomfortable with enforcing this rule. To resolve some of the conflict surrounding this issue I strongly urge providers to answer this question: What is more important to you—time or money? If time is more important to you and your regular hours end at 6:00 p.m., this means you don't want to work after then no matter how much a client is willing to pay you. You want the time to spend with your family or for yourself. If this is the case, you need to set a high consequence for the client to stop the behavior.

That could mean charging \$1 a minute or more for a late pick up. One provider complained that a client kept showing up late even though her late fee was \$50 a half hour! Since the client didn't hesitate to pay the late fee the provider needs to raise it even more to change the behavior.

If money is more important to you, this means you would be willing to work after 6:00pm if the amount of money was right. If this is the case, you want to set your late fee low enough so that enough clients will be late and you can earn some extra money. A \$1 a minute late fee is \$60 an hour and many clients may not be willing to pay this. If you lowered your late fee to \$0.50 a minute (\$30 an hour) you may find more clients feeling like they can afford to be late.

One provider told me of a different kind of solution she came up with to address this problem. She did not like having a late fee because it was associated with guilt and blame, and it created tension between her and her clients. Instead she said that after her regular pick up time she had an "evening rate" which was higher than her regular rate. She said that by calling this an evening rate rather than a late fee it reduced the stress for both her and her clients. Obviously this provider considered money more important than time so this solution worked for her.

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