



**Georgia Dept
of Early Care
and Learning**
BRIGHT FROM THE START



EXEMPTIONS NEWS YOU CAN USE FALL 2024 Newsletter

Dear Providers,

In the Exemptions Unit, safety stands as our unwavering priority, reflecting our deep commitment to the well-being of both children and staff throughout Georgia. We are thrilled to continuously strengthen the importance of criminal background checks mandated by the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), a vital step in fostering a secure and nurturing environment for a successful school year.

It is essential that exemption programs receiving Childcare and Parents Services (CAPS) subsidies, specifically categories 1 and 7, conduct these background checks for all staff members. By embracing these safety protocols, we not only protect our little learners but also strengthen our community bonds, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive in a safe educational setting. So, let's gear up together—because when it comes to safety, we are all in this together! Join us in this important endeavor and be a part of our mission to enhance the quality of early care and education in Georgia.

We invite you to explore the DECAL website, where you'll find an easy-to-navigate green box marked "Criminal Records Check" conveniently located on the right side of the screen. A simple click will lead you to our extensive Criminal Records Check landing page, brimming with valuable information designed to empower you in your quest for safety and security. Your dedication to creating a nurturing environment for our children is truly commendable, and we sincerely appreciate your efforts in fostering a community built on trust and collaboration.

Thank you for being an essential part of this mission to keep our young ones safe!

Below is a summary of the information you can find:

- Background check news
- How to contact the Criminal Records Check division within DECAL
- Fingerprinting site information
- Instructions for out of state contacts
- How to submit the online records check application in DECAL KOALA
- Videos & webinars
- Other helpful documents (including the Comprehensive Background Check Policy)

At DECAL, we recognize that ensuring a successful background check determination is not just a procedural requirement; it is a fundamental part of our unwavering commitment to child safety in Georgia. We are dedicated to guiding you through this important process with both confidence and clarity, ensuring that you feel supported every step of the way. Begin your journey by completing the Criminal Background Check (CBC) Application in

DECAL KOALA, followed by the fingerprinting registration process.

We encourage you to prioritize punctuality by arriving at your scheduled appointment time at the designated fingerprint location, as this will facilitate a smooth and efficient experience. Together, through thorough background checks, we are building a foundation of trust that enhances the quality of early childhood education in our state, creating a secure and nurturing environment for our young learners.

Should you encounter any issues or receive a background check letter that doesn't align with DECAL's standards, please don't hesitate to reach out for assistance. Your proactive approach is crucial, and our dedicated team is ready to support you every step of the way. For any questions or guidance, feel free to contact the Criminal Records Check division at CRC@decals.ga.gov or call 1-855-884-7444. Together, we can ensure a safe and nurturing environment for all of Georgia's children, fostering a collaborative spirit within our community.

Take care and have an amazingly safe and great school year!



**Child Care
SERVICES**



EFFECTIVE OCTOBER 1, 2024 - NEW EXEMPTION RULE CHANGES

Per adopted rule changes that are effective October 1, 2024, exemption rules have been updated. Please refer to New vs Old Exemptions Categories for updated exemption information.

An online self-assessment is now available, for programs to determine exemption status.

If you have any questions, please email
ExemptionRulesChanges@dec.al.ga.gov.

NEW EXEMPTION CATEGORIES effective October 1, 2024

CATEGORY 1: **Government Owned and Operated**

Programs which are owned and operated by any department or agency of state, county, or municipal government. This includes, but is not limited to, the customary school day, as defined in Georgia law, and

before- and/or after- school programs in public schools operated by the public school system and staffed with school system employees, recreation programs operated by city or county parks and recreation departments and staffed with city or county employees, and charter schools that operate under the terms of a charter or contract, with an authorizer, such as the state and local boards of education in accordance with the Charter Schools Act, O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2060 *et seq*, and is recognized by the State Charter Schools Commission of Georgia.

*CAPS eligible must apply using current processes

CATEGORY 2:

National Membership School-Aged

Any program or facility providing care for school-aged children that is operated by, or in affiliation with a national membership non-profit organization that was created for the purpose of providing youth services and youth development, that charges a membership fee for children and may receive monthly, weekly, or daily fees for services. Such program or facility holds membership in good standing and is certified by its national association as complying with the association's purposes, procedures, minimum standards, and mandatory requirements.

CATEGORY 3:

Private Schools

Private school programs that meet one or more of the following:

(i) A non-accredited private school which provides education in any grades from kindergarten through 12th grade, and which provides care before, after, or both before and after the customary school day, as defined in Georgia law, to its students as an auxiliary service.

(ii) Accredited private non-public educational programs with an established curriculum for four-year-old children for the customary school day, as defined in Georgia law, that are not part of a full day Child Care Learning Center and are an integral part of an accredited private non-public school that provides elementary or secondary instruction or both, providing the accreditation specifically covers these ages; any before and/or after school hours for four-year-old children who attend such a program as described above, provided the children do not leave the premises of the accredited private non-public school and the program is staffed with employees of that private non-public school.

(iii) An accredited private educational program with an established curriculum for four-year-old children for the customary school day, as defined in Georgia law, that are not part of a full day Child Care Learning Center and are an integral part of an accredited private educational program that provides elementary or secondary instruction or both, providing the accreditation specifically covers these ages; any before and/or after school hours for four-year-old children who attend such a program as described above, provided the children do not leave the premises of the accredited private educational program and the program is staffed with employees of that private school.

CATEGORY 4:

Short Term Care

A program serving children for no more than four (4) hours a day, excluding before and after school care. This may include part-time preschool, parent's morning or night out, short-term educational or recreational classes, or single skill activities.

CATEGORY 5: Licensed Faith Based Accredited or Religious Schools

A Center that is licensed by the Department may request an exemption from licensure if the Center's program is an integral part of an established religious congregation or religious school that conducts regularly scheduled classes, courses of study, or educational programs and is a member of, or accredited or certified by a state, regional, or national accrediting agency for religious educational instruction or a state, regional, or national accrediting agency for educational instruction as recognized and approved by the Department if such accrediting entity uses standards that are substantially similar to those established by the Department. In addition to the requirements listed above applicable to all exemptions, the following additional requirements shall apply to Centers seeking an exemption under this provision:

(i) A Center seeking such exemption from licensure shall be required to submit to the Department documentation of certification or accreditation, including a copy of its most recent certification or accreditation inspection report, and any other pertinent documentation as requested by the Department, such as non-profit tax-

exempt verification. The accrediting agency must conduct regularly scheduled visits to the program while such program remains accredited.

ii) If such exemption is granted, the program shall submit annual documentation to the Department verifying its continued certification or accreditation, including a copy of its most recent certification or accreditation inspection report, and other pertinent documentation as may be requested by the Department.

(iii) Such exemptions granted by the Department are valid as long as the program remains certified or accredited for all ages in which the certification or accreditation is approved. The program shall provide the Department written notice within five (5) business days of the program's loss of certification or accreditation, including a copy of such notification from the certifying or accrediting entity.

The Department shall rescind the program's exemption granted herein upon notification of the loss of certification or accreditation.

(iv) Any Center seeking such exemption shall comply with all applicable requirements for background checks for Directors, Provisional Employees and Employees as required in O.C.G.A. § 20-1A-30 *et seq.*, Chapter 591-1-1, Rules for Child Care Learning Centers, Department policies, as well as applicable local, regional, and state health department, state fire marshal, and local fire prevention guidelines/requirements while such exemption is in effect. The Department retains jurisdiction over programs granted such exemption to conduct unannounced periodic background check audits and to conduct complaint investigations regarding compliance with background check requirements, as well as

compliance with local, regional, and state health department, state fire marshal, and local fire prevention guidelines/requirements.

(v) The Department may rescind such exemption for a program's failure to comply with the requirements for background checks for directors/employees pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 20-1A-30 *et seq.*, Chapter 591-1-1, Rules for Child Care Learning Centers, and Department policies.

(vi) Any Center applying for such exemption that is owned and/or under the legal control/direction of the certifying or accrediting entity shall not be approved by the Department.

(vii) A Center seeking such exemption shall adopt and comply with the minimum standards of its certifying or accrediting entity for the operation of the Center's program. Such minimum standards adopted by the Center shall be published and made available to Parents of enrolled or prospective children upon request.

(viii) A program granted such exemption shall comply with the requirements regarding notification to Parents of enrolled children if the program does not carry liability insurance.

CATEGORY 6: **RESERVED**

CATEGORY 7: **Day Camp Programs or School Breaks for School-Aged Children**

Any program whose primary purpose is to provide organized recreational, religious, or instructional activities for children five (5) years and older that is operated during summer and other school breaks for no more than twelve (12) hours per day.

CAPS eligible must apply using current processes.

*If program will not receive CAPS, the provider can self-assess.



For additional information, regarding the **New Exemption Rules & New Exemption Categories**, please feel free to visit the [DECAL](#) website.

**DECAL HEALTH AND
SAFETY ORIENTATION TRAINING**



The Georgia Professional Development System houses free DECAL Health and Safety Orientation trainings. While it is not required that providers use the DECAL training site, there is assurance when going through the PDS platform that all required components are being met. To access the DECAL Health and Safety Orientation training [click here](#).

The free DECAL Health and Safety orientation training uses Georgia language, rules, and annotations that providers are familiar with.

The link below will provide you with a guided outline to the difference between all trainings required by DECAL, from the initial orientation training completed by employers to the 10-hours of annual child-related training. <https://www.decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/TrainingFAQ.pdf>

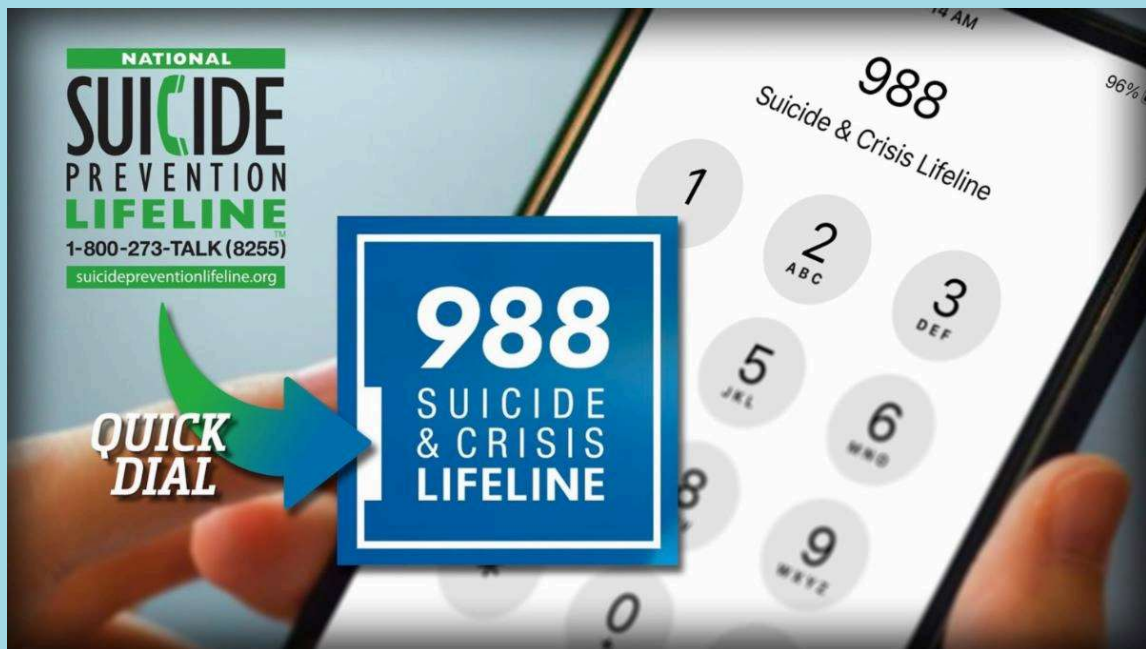


September was National Suicide Prevention Month

September ushered in National Suicide Prevention Month, a significant time when mental health advocates, prevention organizations, survivors, allies, and community members united to shed light on the critical importance of suicide prevention awareness.

While this month served as a powerful reminder, the truth is that suicide prevention is a serious and ongoing concern that demands our attention every day. This initiative inspires us all to engage in impactful conversations, sharing invaluable resources and heartfelt testimonials that underscore the transformative power of community support.

During World Suicide Prevention Day, we were called to honor those affected by suicide and amplify our efforts to ensure that essential treatment reaches those in need. Together, we can cultivate an environment filled with hope and resilience, profoundly impacting the lives of families and children within our communities. Let us stand united in our commitment to mental health, ensuring every voice is heard and every life is cherished, reinforcing the belief that together, we can make a difference.



OCTOBER IS SUDDEN INFANT DEATH SYNDROME (SIDS) AWARENESS MONTH



Did you know October is sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) awareness month? By promoting and raising

awareness for safe sleep practices, we can work together to protect our youngest and most vulnerable members of society. Understanding the risk factors, safe sleep practices, and spreading knowledge is critical in the prevention of SIDS. There are some simple steps that can be taken to reduce the risks.

Use the links below for expert advice and information!

https://www.nichd.nih.gov/sites/default/files/2022-10/NICHD_STS_2022_Handout_English508_o.pdf
<https://www.strong4life.com/en/staying-safe/safe-sleep/safe-sleep-for-baby-putting-popular-myths-to-rest?>

OCTOBER IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH



**DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE**
AWARENESS MONTH

Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM) is a national campaign dedicated to raising awareness about domestic violence. Every October, organizations and individuals unite across the country for a national effort to uplift the needs, voices, and experiences of survivors.

Congress declared the month of October to be Domestic Violence Awareness Month in 1989.

To raise awareness and prevention of domestic violence, click on the video.



Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS)
Important Updates
WEBINAR SERIES - NOW AVAILABLE

NOW AVAILABLE!
ALL CAPS WEBINAR SERIES RECORDINGS

ABOUT
IMPORTANT UPDATES



**CAPS
POLICY CHANGES
&
ACCESS
CONCLUSION**

**NEW
PROCESSES
&
DEADLINES
FOR
UPDATING
CAPS RATES**

**NEW
QUALITY RATED
RATES
&
PAYMENTS**

**NEW
BUSINESS
RESOURCES
&
SUPPORTS**

**GO TO THE WEBINAR
RECORDINGS**

**GO TO THE WEBINAR RECORDINGS BY
CLICKING ON THE LINK BELOW:**

[Provider Relations](#) | [Childcare and Parent Services \(CAPS\) \(ga.gov\)](#)[Link](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**Playground Safety Tips for
Early Childhood Programs Resources**



- **Webinar slides**

(English): <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-r9l3uizxnAJn04d9oHeNePUKF9xbTSx/view?usp=sharing>

- **Webinar slides (Spanish):**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-MYJ9T5TglTzcFjTEodn9Dv8UK255RZk/view?usp=sharing>

- **JoinMyPeers:** <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/mypeers-social-network-early-childhood-professionals>

- **Resources for Safe Playgrounds:** These resources give designers, directors, and facility managers technical safety guidelines for designing, constructing, and maintaining playgrounds.
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/instalaciones/articulo/recursos-safe-playgrounds>

- **Sample Playground Checklist** Use this checklist to identify safety hazards outdoors.

<https://www.virtuallabschool.org/school-age/safe-environments/lesson-1/act/22416>

- National Program for Playground Safety NPPS has playground safety best practices for the early childhood professional community.

<https://playgroundsafety.uni.edu/>

- **Public Playground Safety Checklist** Use this simple checklist to help make sure playgrounds are safe.

<https://www.cpsc.gov/safety-education/safety-guides/playgrounds/public-playground-safety-checklist>

- **Nature-based Learning and Development** Watch this video series to plan successful nature-based activities.

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/learning-environments/article/nature-based-learning-development>

- **LET'S GET OUTSIDE!** Providers This resource has suggestions to enhance early childhood outdoor spaces, through low-cost improvements and programming.

<https://naturalearning.org/go-providers>

- **Playground Safety Review** publications, infographics webinar recordings and links from the Children's Safety Network.

<https://www.childrenssafetynetwork.org/child-safety-topics/playground-safety>

- **Playground Safety Toolkit Prevent Child Injury** has fact sheets, infographics, social media messages, and newsletter articles to share with families.

<https://www.preventchildinjury.org/toolkits/playgrounds-safe-surfaces>

- **Caring for Our Children (CFOC) Chapter 6: Play Areas/Playgrounds and Transportation** These national standards represent best practices for quality

health and safety policies and practices.
<https://nrckids.org/CFOC>



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

At DECAL, we are deeply committed to enhancing the exemption application process for families and providers throughout Georgia. We recognize that your experiences and feedback are invaluable in helping us understand the challenges you face while navigating the online application. Your insights will guide us in making the process smoother and more accessible, reflecting our dedication to continuous improvement and community collaboration.

We encourage you to share your thoughts and experiences with us openly, as your voice is essential in fostering a supportive environment. Should you need assistance, please reach out to us

via email at CCSExemptions@dec.al.ga.gov or call our voicemail at 770-293-5977. Together, we can streamline the application process and ultimately contribute to a brighter future for early childhood education in our community.



DECAL Social Media



Georgia Dept
of Early Care
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BRIGHT FROM THE START

Social Media Checklist



[https://www.facebook.com/
brightfromthestart](https://www.facebook.com/brightfromthestart)



[@GADeptEarlyCare](https://twitter.com/GADeptEarlyCare)



[@Brightfromthestart](https://www.instagram.com/Brightfromthestart)



[https://www.youtube.com
/user/GADECAL](https://www.youtube.com/user/GADECAL)

Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

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