

Families First Guide

Making Families First Work for You in Tennessee

This guide was written by the Tennessee Justice Center and
the Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland. 7/06



How to find out what you need to know

Families First is Tennessee's program to help low income people with children. Here are questions many people ask about Families First. To find the answer to a question, go to the page number next to the question.

What is Families First?	2
What help can I get from Families First?	2
Families First Payments	2
TennCare	3
Child Care	3
Transportation including car repairs and car loans	3
Dental Care or eyeglasses	4
School and training	4
Can immigrants get help from Families First? - Yes	5
Can I still get child support if I am on Families First? - Yes	6
What do I have to do if I am on Families First?	8
Have a medical, learning or nerve problem?	
Or is someone hurting you?	
Or have a problem with drugs or alcohol?	10
How long can I get Families First payments?	12
What can I do if I don't like what is happening to me in Families First?	14
What if my worker tells me I have to get a certain paper or	
I have to prove something?	15
What will happen to my rent if I live in public housing and I go	
to work while I am on Families First?	15
What help can I get from Human Services after my Families	
First payments stop?	16
TennCare	16
Child care	16
Transportation	17
Food stamps	17
Special payments	17
Who can help me if I have problems?	18
Who do I call about my Families First case?	18

What is Families First?

If your children are on Families First, you can get cash each month. You and the children also get TennCare health insurance.

Sometimes Families First gives extra help to the adults in the family. As part of Families First, you may be working or going to school. Or you may be looking for a job or going to training. While you are doing these things, you may also get help with:

- child care
- transportation including car repairs and car loans
- dental care
- eye glasses
- training and education, and
- other things you need to be able to work.

Not everyone on Families First can get these kinds of help. Ask your worker if you can get them.

To get Families First, you must:

- Have a child living with you who is under 18 (or sometimes 19).
- Be kin to the child by blood or marriage.
- Have family income below the amount allowed by Families First.

To get Families First, you must agree to do certain things. They are all written down in what is called a Personal Responsibility Plan or PRP.

- **Everyone** who gets Families First payments for a child must agree to do certain things. See page 11 for what everyone must do.
- **Most** parents also have to do other things that are called **Families First activities**. This can be working, looking for work, going to school or some kind of training. To see what



kind of things you can do, look at page 12. Some parents don't have to do Families First activities. Do you have to do Families First activities? To find out, see page 11.

- **Most** families can only get Families First payments for a certain length of time. This is called time limits. Some families will not have time limits. To see if your family has time limits, look at page 15.

How to apply for Families First

Get an application paper from the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS). Fill it out. Turn it in right away.

After you turn in your papers, you need to see a worker at DHS. In some counties, you will get a letter telling you when to come in. In other counties, you can come in any time. Be sure to find out how it works in your county. If you have problems getting to see a worker, call your local DHS office. **OR** call the Family Assistance Service Center at **1-866-311-4287**. This is a free call.



Within 45 days, you should know if you can get Families First. The 45 days start when you turn in the papers.

What kind of help can I get from Families First?

Families First asks you to do a lot, but you can get a lot from it too. Here is some of the help you can get if you are on Families First.

Families First payments

You can get money to help take care of your children. How much can you get? It depends on how many children you have and what other income you have. You do not get a check. Instead you get a



plastic cash card. You can use the card at an ATM machine or a grocery store.

There are two different payment amounts. One is called a regular payment. The other is called a **differential** payment and it is more money. Only certain families can get a differential payment. Everyone else gets the regular payment.

Here is the most you can get. If you have other income you may not get this much.

Number of Persons on Families First	Regular Payment	Differential Payment
1	\$ 95	\$140
2	\$142	\$192
3	\$185	\$232
4	\$226	\$242
5	\$264	\$291
6	\$305	\$305

Who gets a differential payment?

A family gets a differential payment if the parent or relative caring for the children is:

- disabled, or
- age 60 or older, or
- taking care of a disabled relative full time in the home, or
- getting a Families First payment just for the children, not for herself.

TennCare

Everyone on Families First gets TennCare. TennCare will pay for your medical care. What about after you go off Families First? You should keep getting TennCare for 18 months and maybe longer.

Help paying for child care

If you're on Families First, you can get child care help. You can get help paying for child care while you work or go to school. You can also get it while you do any thing else Families First makes you do.

Did you meet the rules for child care help but didn't get it? Then tell your case worker. Families First may pay you back for money you have already spent on child care.



Families First will pay for care for a child under 13. Is your child age 13 or older but has special problems? Then Families First may still pay for care.

To find out how to get child care, call your case worker.

What about after you leave Families First? You may be able to keep getting help with child care for 18 months.

Help paying for transportation

If you're on Families First, you'll need to go lots of places. You may need to go to work, to child care, or to school. Families First must help you get there.



Do you have to go somewhere for Families First? You can get a monthly bus pass or \$4 a day. You can get this every day you have to go somewhere for Families First. You do not have to own a car to get the \$4. If someone gives you a ride to work, you can pay them for the ride. Do you have to go more than 25 miles one way? Then you can get \$5 a day.

Do you own a car? Families First can also help you pay to fix it. Families First can pay up to \$550 for repairs. Or up to 80% of what your car is worth, if that is cheaper. This is the most they will pay in 12 months.



Car loans with lower payments - First Wheels

People who are on Families First can apply for a no-interest car loan. You must have income from

work, child support or Social Security. This car loan program is called "First Wheels."

Have you been off Families First for less than 12 months? If you are working, you can still apply for a car loan. To find out about this program, ask your DHS worker.

Dental work and eye glasses

Do you need dental work or eye glasses to get or keep a job? Families First can help. Families First will pay up to \$400 a year for dental work. They will pay up to \$175 a year for eye exams and glasses.

To get glasses or dental work, call your DHS worker.



School

It can be hard to get a job that pays enough to support a family. You may need more education. Families First can help. You can go to Adult Education classes or GED classes.



Do you already have a high school diploma or a GED? Then you can go to college full-time. The school must be approved by DHS. Families First can help you choose a school. They can help you ask for the loans

or grants to pay for school. What if your Pell or other grants or scholarships won't pay for books and fees? Families First will pay for things like books and fees.

Are you going to college? Under Families First rules, you may have to do other things as well. You must spend 40 hours a week doing Families First activities. Are you a full-time student? Then every college credit hour counts as 1 of the 40 hours. You can also get credit for 1 hour of study time for each credit hour. This is only true if the course requires study. Student internships, labs and tutoring hours also count toward the 40 hours.

After college you can't go to graduate school as part of your Families First activities. Families First won't count graduate school hours on your Personal Responsibility Plan (PRP).

Are you thinking about going to college? Ask DHS if the school you want to go to can be OK'd. Ask about the Families First rules. Ask about picking courses that would be best for you.

Job skills training

You can get training that is needed for a certain kind of job. Families First can tell you what kind of training you can get. Families First can sometimes pay for job training. This may help you get a higher paying job.



Career planning



You can go to Employment Career Services. They will ask about your skills and interests. They can tell you what job choices you have.

Can immigrants get help from DHS? Yes.

Are you an immigrant with legal papers? You can get help from Families First. You may also get help from TennCare. Some legal immigrants can also get help from Food Stamps.

Are you an immigrant with no legal papers? You can get emergency Medicaid. It only covers serious health problems and childbirth.

Without papers you **CAN'T** get help **for yourself** from Families First, TennCare or Food Stamps. If you lie about having papers to get help for yourself, you can get in trouble. But, are your children or relatives legal immigrants or U.S. citizens? Then you **CAN** apply and get help for **them**.

For example, an immigrant with no papers may have a child born in the United States. That child is a U.S. citizen. The parent without papers can't get help except for emergency Medicaid. But, they can get help for their children who are citizens or legal immigrants. You **CAN'T** get in trouble for asking for help for your eligible children. Not asking for help for yourself? Then you don't have to tell DHS your immigration status. You also don't have to give a Social Security Number.

Do you speak another language?

You should still be able to get help from DHS. Don't speak English well? DHS should give you an interpreter for free. Do you need help reading a letter that you get from DHS? They should translate it for you. Call your local DHS office if you need language help.

Will you need an interpreter when you meet with your DHS worker? Try to tell them before you go so you won't have to wait.



Are you on Families First? Families First should count English classes as work time.

If you have problems getting interpreter or translation services, call Crystal Henderson. She is the Title VI coordinator for DHS. Her phone number is **615-313-4748**.

Will getting help keep you from getting a green card or citizenship?

For refugees and anyone who was given asylum:

Getting Food Stamps, TennCare or Families First **WON'T** keep you from getting a green card. It will not keep you from getting U.S. citizenship. Getting SSI will not keep you from getting a green card or U.S. citizenship either.

For immigrants who already have a green card:

Getting Food Stamps, TennCare, Families First or SSI **WON'T** keep you from getting U.S. citizenship.

For immigrants who do not have a green card yet:

Getting Food Stamps will **NOT** keep you from getting a green card. Getting TennCare won't either, unless you need nursing home care.

But, getting Families First payments **COULD** make it harder to get a green card. This is more likely to happen if Families First is your family's only income. You could also have trouble getting a green card if you get SSI payments. Want to apply for Families First or SSI? Before you apply, talk to someone who helps immigrants with legal questions.

To find out more, talk to your DHS worker or their supervisor.



Can I still get child support if I am on Families First? Yes.

You can get child support even if you are on Families First.

Almost everyone gets some child support while they are on Families First.



How child support works when you are on Families First

Almost all child support is now paid first to DHS. This is almost always true even if you are not on Families First. DHS gets the child support. They figure out how much they are supposed to send to you. Then they mail it to you. They call this a “child support pass through payment.”

When the parent pays, how much of the child support do you get? It depends on how much income you have besides Families First.

Is Families First the only money you have? Look at the chart below. It shows the most child support DHS can send on to you. These numbers will change on July 1, 2007.

Number of Persons on Families First	The Most You Can Get Per Month
1	\$552
2	\$677
3	\$778
4	\$856
5	\$917

If the parent pays more than the chart says, DHS keeps the rest.

Are you are getting a differential Families First payment? This is a little bigger than a regular payment. If you are, you might not get as much child support as the chart says.

I have income besides Families First and child support. How much support will they send on to me?

To find out:

- Call the Child Support Information line at **1-800-838-6911**. It's a free call. Ask how much your “unmet need” is. That is how much child support you could get.

How soon will I get my child support?

DHS should send your child support within 2 working days after they get it.

What if you need help getting someone to pay child support?

DHS pays lawyers to help get child support for you. To find out who the lawyers are that do this in your county:

- Call your county DHS office,
- Or call the Child Support Information Line at **1-800-838-6911**. It's a free call.

These lawyers work for DHS, not for you. But the law says they must help you get child support. Here are things these lawyers are supposed to do.

- Don't know where the parent is? The lawyers must try and find the other parent. What if they can't find the parent at first? Then they must try again every 3 months. They must also try every time you give them new facts about the other parent.
- They can go to court to prove who the legal father is. Then they must get a court order for child support. If DNA tests are needed, they must set them up and pay for them.
- Don't have a child support order? They must ask the court to order the other parent to pay child support.
- Has the other parent's income gone up? Then they can ask the court to increase child support.
- They must help make sure the other parent pays what they are supposed to.

What can I do if I am having trouble getting child support help?

First, try to reach your child support worker. Call the office in your county that helps people get child support. If you can't reach your worker there, ask to talk to the worker's supervisor. Be sure and say you have a **complaint**.



If that doesn't work, complain to Mike Adams. He is the top child support person in the state. You can call him at **(615) 313-4712**. Tell him your problem with your child support office. Tell him what you have done to try to get them to help you. Be ready to give him your Social Security number.

If that does not work, call the legal services program in your county. They may be able to help you.

Still can't get any help?

You can write to the federal government to complain. The person you should write to is:

Program Manager
Office of Child Support Enforcement
ACL Atlanta Federal Center, Suite 4M60
61 Forsythe Street, S.W.
Atlanta, GA 30303

Send a copy of your letter to the head of DHS. It is her job to make sure Child Support Services helps you. Send a copy to:

Commissioner Gina Lodge
Department of Human Services
400 Deaderick Street, 15th Floor
Nashville, TN 37248-7200

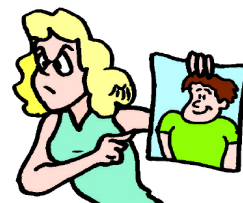
You may want to send a copy to your state senator or state representative. You can get the name and address from the county election commission.

You can file for child support on your own.

You have the right to file for child support on your own. This is true even if Child Support

Services has your case. You don't need a lawyer to file these kinds of child support cases:

- Proving who the legal father is (called legitimation or paternity)
- Getting a child support order
- Asking for more child support
- Enforcing an order you already have (contempt).



In most cases, you file in Juvenile Court. Do you already have a child support order in a divorce case from Circuit Court? Then you will need to go back to Circuit Court.

Know how much child support you should be getting? What if Human Services does not send you that much?

- Call the Child Support Information Line at **1-800-838-6911**. It's a free call. Tell the person who answers the phone about any child support that you didn't get. Tell them you want a **review**. They will send you a paper to fill out and mail in. Make a copy to keep.
- Or call your local legal services program. Ask for "How to get your child support while you are on Families First." This paper tells you how to figure out how much child support you could get.
- What if you don't hear back in 30 days? Or what if they don't fix the problem? Then you can ask them for a fair hearing. You can do this by writing to:

Tennessee Department of Human Services
Division of Appeals and Hearings
PO Box 198996
Nashville, TN 37219-8996

OR you can call the Family Assistance Service Center at **1-866-311-4287**. It's a free call.

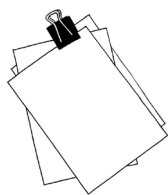
A fair hearing lets you tell your side of the story. You tell it to someone who has not heard it before. This person is called a hearing officer.

What do I have to do if I am on Families First?

Your Families First Plan

You have a Families First plan for what you will be doing. It is called a Personal Responsibility Plan or PRP. What if you don't do the things in your plan? They can stop your Families First payments.

Important - You can **change** your PRP for certain reasons. You can change it if the plan is unsuitable. **Unsuitable** means the Families First activity you are in is not right for you. You can't decide this on your own. The people who run the Families First activity you are in must agree. You can also change your PRP for other reasons.



Things everyone has to do:

In order to be on the Families First program, you must:

- ✓ Make sure your children go to kindergarten and school.
- ✓ Help DHS get child support for your children. This is true unless you have a "good cause" reason not to help. One good reason is if the other parent might hurt you or the children. If you have a good reason, tell your Families First worker.
- ✓ Make sure your children have regular health check-ups and shots.
- ✓ Are you a teen parent? Then you must stay in school and live with your parent. This is true unless you have a good reason not to.
- ✓ Are you in Vocational Rehabilitation services? Then you must stay in your training. This is true unless you have a "good cause" reason for not doing the training.

Things some people have to do:

Some people have to do Families First activities for 20 to 40 hours per week.

You do NOT have to do Families First activities if:

- ✓ You are not the parent of the children you are taking care of. **AND** you get Families First payments only for the children, not for yourself. **OR**
- ✓ You have a bad health or nerve problem or serious learning problem. **OR**
- ✓ You have a disabled child or relative who lives with you. You have to stay home to take care of them. **OR**
- ✓ You are permanently disabled. **OR**
- ✓ You are age sixty or older. **OR**
- ✓ You are a mother whose baby is less than one year old. **OR**
- ✓ You are trying to get away after being hit or abused. For example, you may be in a shelter for abused women. **OR**
- ✓ You are in a drug or alcohol treatment program that your worker OK'd. **OR**
- ✓ You are in rehabilitation services training.

Is one of these things true for you? Then tell your worker you are "**exempt**". This means you don't have to do Families First activities 20 or 40 hours a week.

Here is what you have to do if you are not "exempt"...

What if you are not exempt?

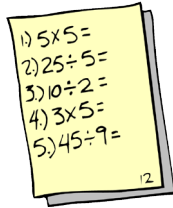
You have to do Families First activities for either 20 or 40 hours per week.

If you **DON'T** have a high school diploma or a GED. . .

Then you will be asked if you want to take a test. The test will check how well you read and do math. You don't have to take the test but it could help you.

What if you score below the 9th grade level on either reading or math? Then you have a choice.

- You can go to Adult Education classes for 20 hours per week.
- **OR** you can do other things such as work for 40 hours per week.



Important - Some people can get Families First for only a certain number of months. Are you one of these people? Did you score below 9th grade? Then think carefully about your choice. If you decide to go to school, DHS will **not** count the months until you reach the 9th grade level. If you decide not to go to school, DHS **will** count those months. To find out more about this, see page 12.

If you **DO** have a high school diploma or GED ...

Then you won't be tested to see how well you can read and do math. Think you might score below the 9th grade level? Then you can ask to take the test.



If not, you must do "Families First activities" for 40 hours per week. These activities can be work, school, Employment Career Services, job training or other things.

You can choose what you want to do.

But, you can only choose things Families First allows. Ask your DHS worker to explain the different things that you can do. You can do more than one thing. For

example, you could go to school part-time and work. You could also do Employment Career Services part-time.



Have a medical, learning, or nerve problem? Or need help because someone is hurting you? Or have a problem with drugs or alcohol?

For these problems, you can get special help from Families First. Does your problem keep you from doing your Families First activities? Then they should not stop your Families First money.

You may also have rights under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA).

Does a child or relative who lives with you have one of these problems? Then you may still have these rights. If one of these is true for you, then:

If you can't do something Families First asked you to do:

- they can help you do it, or
- they can change what you have to do.

Here are some of the ways they can help:

- They can call or visit if you are not able to come to the office.
- They can help you understand any papers you get about Families First.
- They will help if you can't do something in your Families First plan.
- They can help you appeal.



If you need some other kind of help, you can ask for it. To get help, call your DHS worker.

You can ask to see a Family Services Counselor.

It's hard to raise a family in these times. That's why you may want to get help from a Family Services Counselor. They are not part of DHS. But, DHS pays them to help you or your family with problems like these:

- medical problems
- learning problems
- nerve problems
- someone hurting you or your children
- drug problems
- drinking problems

Family Services Counselors can talk with you in private about what help you need. They won't tell anyone else what you say unless they have your OK. But, they have to tell if they think a child has been abused or neglected. Also, they must tell if they find out you don't qualify for Families First.

A Family Services Counselor can help you:

- Set up a plan for your Families First activities that fits your needs.
- Get the counseling, treatment or other help you need.
- Get special classes if you are having trouble with the classes you are in.
- Get into a shelter for women who are trying to get away from abuse.
- Be excused from having to work while you deal with serious problems. This will not count toward your Families First time limit.
- If you are disabled, help you apply for Social Security and SSI disability.

Here is how you can get to see a Family Services Counselor.

Tell your DHS worker you want to see a Family Services Counselor. You **don't** have to say **why** you want to see the



Counselor. Does someone help you with your other Families First activities? You can also tell them that you would like to see a Family Services Counselor.

What if someone is hurting you or says they will hurt you?

If you are in danger **right now**, you should call the police or sheriff's department.



You can also call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at **1-800-799-7233**. It's a free call. Have a TTY? Then call 1-800-787-3224. The National Domestic Violence Hotline can help no matter

where you are or what language you speak. Not sure you have a problem? Call them. They can tell you if you should be worried. They can tell you how bad your problem really is. Do you know you have a problem and need help? Then you can get it at this number. They can give counseling or talk to you if things are really bad. They can tell you what shelters and agencies can help you. Do you need to move out of your apartment or house? They can tell you where to go.

What are the rules for someone on Families First who is staying at a women's shelter? Or is trying to get away from someone who is hurting them?

Are you staying at a shelter for abused women? Then you don't have to do Families First activities while you are there.



Many people can only get Families First payments for 18 months at a time. If that is true for you, your months in a shelter don't count toward your 18. Do you want to find out more about your time limit? See page 12 in this booklet. Read the part called "How Long Can I Get Families First Payments?".

Are you not in a shelter but you or your children are in danger? You can ask to see a Family Services Counselor. They can decide that months you are in danger don't count in your 18 months.

Be sure and tell your worker if this is happening to you.

What if I can't work?

Getting SSI or Social Security Disability Payments

SSI stands for Supplemental Security Income. It is a program run by Social Security. It helps support low income people:

- who are over age 65 **OR**
- who have problems that keep them from working

Is one of these true for you? You may be able to get SSI. Have you worked enough in the past? Then you may also be able to get Social Security Disability payments. Both SSI and Social Security disability pay much more than Families First.

How do I get SSI or Social Security Disability?

Are you on Families First? Then a Family Services Counselor can help you apply for SSI and Social Security disability. To apply for disability on your own, call **1-800-772-1213**. Call between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. Why should you call this number? To set up a time to talk with someone at your local Social Security office. You don't have to go to the Social Security office to apply. They can do the interview over the phone.

What if they turn me down for SSI or Social Security Disability?

Don't give up. It can take a long time to win disability. Many people who are turned down at first end up getting disability payments. The letter turning you down will tell you how to ask for a reconsideration. Do that. If you're turned down again, you can appeal for a hearing. You can ask a Legal Aid lawyer to help you with your appeal hearing. You can call Legal Aid for free at **1-800-238-1443**.

Have you applied for SSI or Social Security disability before and been turned down? You can apply again. Is there still time to appeal your case? Then you should appeal instead of applying again.

How long can I get Families First payments?

Some people can only get Families First payments for 18 months at a time. They can only get Families First for 60 months during a whole lifetime. 60 months is 5 years. Families First calls the 18 months and 60 months your “time limits”. After the 18 months, your payments will usually stop for 3 months. After getting payments for 60 months, your payments may stop. The payments stop even if you did everything you were supposed to do.

Families First starts counting the month after you first signed a Families First Plan (PRP). They don’t count months that you did not get a payment.



Some families don't have time limits. They keep getting payments no matter how long they are on Families First.

Here is a list of families who do not have time limits. Tell your DHS worker if anything on this list is true for you.

- The relative caring for the children is not their parent. They get Families First payments only for the children, not for themselves.
- A parent or relative caring for the children has to stay home. They must stay home to care for a disabled child or relative living with them.
- The parent or relative caring for the children is permanently disabled.



- The parent or relative caring for the children is going to Adult Education classes. They can’t read or do math at the 9th grade level.
- The parent or relative caring for the children is 60 or older.
- The parent caring for the children is under 18 or going to a regular high school.

Some families have time limits. But some months should not count as part of their 18 and 60 month limits.

Here is a list of months that should not count against your time limit. Another way to say this is that your time clock stops during these months. Tell your DHS worker if anything on this list is true for you. Then your worker can stop your time clock.

- For more than 2 weeks that month, you can’t get into an activity in your plan
- For more than 2 weeks that month, you can’t get child care or transportation.
- You have a child younger than 1 year old.
- You are staying at a shelter for abused women.
- You are trying to get away from someone who hurt or threatened you or your children. This can be a spouse, parent of your children or former boyfriend.
- You have a medical or nerve problem that makes it hard for you to work. Human Services calls this “incapacity.”
- You are in a drug or alcohol treatment program that was OK’ed by Families First.
- You are referred to Vocational Rehabilitation. Families First should not count the month you are referred and the month after that. Sometimes more months will not count.
- You are referred to Families Services Counseling. Families First should not count the month you are referred. Sometimes more months will not count.

Have you used up your 18 or 60 month time limit? You still may be able to keep getting Families First payments.

You can keep getting payments if:

- You are doing what you are supposed to do in Families First now
- You did not quit or turn down a job without a good reason

AND

- 1** You live in a county that has a high unemployment rate. It must be twice the unemployment rate of the whole State of Tennessee. This lets you get Families First for another six months. Or until the county unemployment rate goes down.

OR:

- 2** Your total family income, without your Families First, **is less than** the amount listed below. The amounts are different for the 18 month time limit and the 60 month limit. Count your money from work, child support and other income. Don't count SSI payments.

Number of Persons Getting Families First	1	2	3	4	5	6
After 18 months on Families First, income is less than	\$268	\$370	\$440	\$462	\$556	\$561
After 60 months on Families First, income is less than	\$375	\$517	\$616	\$646	\$778	\$785

Important! You can check if these amounts have changed. Call the Family Assistance Service Center at **1-866-311-4287**. It's a free call.

Have you been cut off many times for not following your plan? Then you might **NOT** be able to keep getting payments.

What should you do if your time limit is almost up?

What if your DHS worker says your time is up? It might be a mistake.

People often make mistakes. If your time is up or almost up, think about doing these things:

- Try to figure out all the times your clock should have stopped for Families First. Look at the list on page 12. Do you think your time should not be up? Call your DHS worker or the Tennessee Justice Center (**615-255-0331**). Ask for your case to be rechecked.
- Did Families First send you a letter saying you will be cut off soon? You can appeal if you



think they are wrong. Can you keep getting Families First payments while you appeal? Yes, **IF** you appeal right away (within 10 days of the date of the letter).

Protect Yourself

Let your DHS worker know any time your time clock should stop running.

Cut off because you used up your 60 months? Maybe you can get back on Families First.

If your income is low, you may be able to get back on Families First. Call the Families First Hot Line at **1-888-863-6178** to find out. It's a free call. Or call the legal aid program in your area.

What can I do if I don't like what's happening to me in Families First?

If you don't like what's happening in your case, you can do something about it. Do you have a problem? Sometimes you can fix it by talking to your DHS case worker. If you can't reach your worker, ask for the supervisor. If you can't reach the supervisor, call **1-866-311-4287**. This is the Family Assistance Service Center number. It's a free call.



Did you miss an appointment at the DHS office?

Call the office right away for a new appointment. Can't reach your case worker? Call the Family Assistance Service Center at **1-866-311-4287**. It's a free call.

Did you NOT do something you said you would do?

You may still be able to keep your Families First payments. Call your case worker within 10 days if:

- You are going to do what you said, or
- You have a good reason for what you did not do.

Did your DHS worker make a mistake?

Tell your DHS worker right away. You can also meet with a supervisor about the problem if you want to. If there is still a problem, you can appeal.

Do you want to change your Families First Plan (PRP)?

You can change your PRP for a number of reasons. One reason is if it is unsuitable.

Unsuitable means the Families First activity you are in is not right for you. You can't decide this on your own. The people who run the Families First activity you are in must agree. You can also change your PRP for other reasons. If you can't get your worker to listen, talk to your worker's supervisor. If there is still a problem, you can appeal.

You can appeal

What if you talk to your worker or someone else at DHS? What if you still can't work out the problem? **Don't give up**. You can appeal. To appeal, call your case worker or the Family Assistance Service Center at **1-866-311-4287**. It's a free call. In an appeal, you talk to a different person about the problem. This person is called a hearing officer or judge. You also say what you want. Does this judge believe you are right? Then she has the power to order DHS to do what you want.



Here are some of the things you can appeal about:

- You are turned down for Families First.
- Your Families First payments are cut off or cut down.
- They take too long to give you your Families First payments.
- They won't give you the Families First payments you should have gotten in the past.
- You have problems with child care, transportation or other things you should get.
- You didn't get all the child support you thought you should get.
- You disagree about what is in your Families First Plan (PRP). Or you disagree about what you have to do for Families First.

What happens when you appeal?

You get a letter telling you where a hearing will be held. If it would be easier for you, the hearing can be by telephone. But it might help your case for the hearing officer to see you in person.

At the hearing, you can tell the judge about your problem. Your worker will probably be there too. You can bring someone to help you if you want. You can bring a friend or a lawyer.

A lot of times problems can be worked out before the hearing. Before a worker goes to a hearing, they may talk to someone else about your case. If they find out you are right, they'll fix your problem before the hearing.

How to appeal

You can call your worker or the Family Assistance Service Center at **1-866-311-4287**. You can also write to ask for an appeal. Write to:

Tennessee Dept. of Human Services
Division of Appeals and Hearings
P.O. Box 198996
Nashville, TN 37219-8996

Or you can send a fax to **1-866-355-6136** and ask for an appeal.

You have 90 days to appeal but it's better to appeal within 10 days. Are your Families First payments stopping or going down? It may take 2 to 3 months to get a decision from an appeal. To keep getting the same payments during the appeal, appeal within 10 days. Be sure to tell DHS you want to get the same payments during the appeal.

Count the 10 days from the date on your letter. Is the 10th day is a weekend or holiday? Then you can appeal on the next work day.

If you wait longer than 10 days, you can still appeal. But your payments will stop or go down until after the hearing. If you win at the hearing, DHS will pay you back.

What if you **keep** getting the same cash payments and then you **lose** at the hearing? You

may have to pay back the payments you got before the hearing.

Want free legal help?

You may be able to get free legal help from the legal service programs in your area. They are not a part of DHS.



Other things you may need to know about Families First

What if my worker tells me I have to get a certain paper? What if I have to prove something?

Your worker may tell you that to get a certain paper to prove something. This could be a paper showing how much you make if you are working. It could be a paper from a doctor to prove that your child was sick. Do you think you will have problems getting whatever your worker asked for? Then tell her you need help. Your worker is supposed to help. You can ask your worker to call and find out what she needs to know. Did you tell your worker you had trouble getting what was needed? Then you should not be cut off or turned down for Families First for this.

I live in public housing. What will happen to my rent if go to work while I am on Families First?

Are you on Families First and living in public housing? Then your rent should **not** go up because of a job or raise you get. What if you get a job or raise **after going off** Families First?

Is it within 6 months of going off Families First? Then your rent still should not go up.

Here's how the "rent freeze" works, For the first 12 months your rent does not go up. For the next 12 months, your rent does go up, but not as much. The housing authority can only count half of the money from your job or raise.



Do you think this applies to you? Did your rent go up anyway? Then you may want to call the legal aid program in your area. See if they can help you. Tell them you have a housing problem.

What help can I get from Human Services after my Families First payments stop?

You can get help after you leave Families First. Here is some of the help you can get.

Medicaid/TennCare

Almost everyone who leaves Families First will have TennCare for at least 18 months. This called "Transitional Medicaid/TennCare." A family will not get Transitional Medicaid/TennCare if they move out of state.



Were you cut off Families First because you would not help them get child support? Did you have a good reason? If not, you can't get Transitional Medicaid/TennCare, but your children can. Everyone else will get at least 18 months of Transitional Medicaid/TennCare.

Even if you can't get Transitional Medicaid/TennCare, you may get TennCare for a different reason.

Important: You may be able to keep TennCare after your 18 months of Transitional Medicaid/TennCare ends. You should get a TennCare

application in the mail before the 18 months end. Be sure to send it in. You should also contact your worker before your 18 months end to see if you can keep your TennCare. If your worker cannot help, call the legal services program in your county for help.

Child Care

You can get child care help for 18 months after you leave Families First, if:

- 1** You are working at least 30 hours a week. **OR** spend 40 hours a week going to school, or going to school and working.

and

- 2** Your income is below the child care guidelines. These guidelines are much higher than the Families First income guidelines.

Are these things true for you? Then most of the time DHS will help you pay for child care. But they **won't** pay for child care if:

- you were cut off Families First for not helping to get child support **or**
- you moved out of state.



The children and parent or relative raising the children must be on Families First.

You will pay part of your child care costs. How much you pay depends on how much you earn. You will get a letter from DHS. It will tell you who to call to set up child care payments. Call right away!

See 1 and 2 on this page. What if they are not true for you when you leave Families First? You can get child care help whenever 1 and 2 are true. But it must be less than 18 months since you left Families First.

Transportation

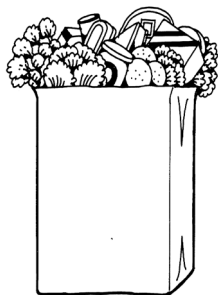
You may be able to get a First Wheels car loan. This is true for up to 12 months after you leave

Families First. You must be working. To find out more about a car loan, see page 4.

Want to find out about getting First Wheels help after you leave Families First? Call your local DHS office.

Food Stamps

You will not lose food stamps just because you leave Families First. Food Stamps are based on your income. You can keep getting Food Stamps as long as your income is low enough. You must also meet the other food stamp rules. Some people will get more food stamps after leaving Families First. Are you having trouble with your food stamps? You can call your local legal services office to see if they can help you.



Can't pay your rent or light bill? Don't have enough food? You can get help.

Have you left Families First? Do you have one of the problems listed below? There are special payments you might get. Some workers may call these payments "auxiliary payments."

You can get these payments if:

- You have an eviction notice because you didn't pay the rent, or
- You have a notice that your lights or heat are about to be shut off. It is because you did not pay the bill, or
- Your family does not have enough food, or
- You owe bills for rent, lights and heat. They add up to more than the money you have coming in each month.



Do you have one of the problems listed above? Call your worker to get a special payment. What if you can't reach your worker, or your worker can't help? You can call the Family Assistance Service Center at **1-866-311-4287** for help. It's a free call.

Some families cannot get a special payment. You **can't** get a special payment if you left Families First because:

- You had too much income.
- You had too many resources (savings, car, etc.).
- You asked in writing for your Families First to stop.
- There are no children under 18 (or sometimes 19) in your family.

Who can help me if I have problems?

Have a **question about your case** or a problem? Call your worker or the worker's supervisor.

Can't reach the worker or supervisor or they can't help you? Call the Family Assistance Service Center at **1-866-311-4287**. It's a free call.

Still can't get help? Call the legal services program in your area. See if they can help you.

Are you on Families First? Having a **problem getting child support?** Call the Child Support Information Line at **1-800-838-6911**. It's a free call. What if they can't help you? Call the legal services program in your area to see if they can help.



Are you having a problem with this card? Call **1-888-997-9444**.

What if I can't get anyone at the DHS office to help me?

Call the Family Assistance Service Center at **1-866-311-4287**. It's a free call.

What if I am having trouble getting DHS to send my child support to me?

Call the Child Support Information Line at **1-800-838-6911**.

It's a free call. What if they can't help you or you can't reach them? Call the legal services program in your area to see if they can help you.



What if I think I need legal help with a Families First problem?

Call the legal services program in your area to see if they can help. They help people for free.

Who do I call about my Families First case?

What if my Families First or food stamps card is broken or lost?

This is the plastic card that has your Families First payment and food stamps on it.



Legal Aid and Legal Services Offices in Tennessee

Legal Aid of East Tennessee

Knoxville (865) 637-0484
Chattanooga (423) 756-4013 or 1-800-572-7457
Cleveland (423) 479-8577 or 1-800-445-3219
Johnson City (423) 928-8311 1-800-821-1312
Maryville (865) 981-1818

Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberlands 1-800-238-1443 (free call)

Offices in: Nashville, Clarksville, Columbia,
Cookeville, Gallatin, Murfreesboro, Oak Ridge
and Tullahoma

Visit us on the internet: **www.las.org**

Memphis Area Legal Services

Memphis (901) 523-8822
Covington (901) 476-1808 or 1-888-207-6386

West Tennessee Legal Services

Jackson (731) 423-0616 or 1-800-372-8346
Dyersburg (731) 285-8181
Huntingdon (731) 986-8975
Selmer (731) 645-7961

Phone Numbers & Notes

Family Assistance Service Center

1-866-311-4287

Child Support Info Line 1-800-838-6911

1-800-838-6911

Food Stamp Card 1-888-997-9444

1-888-997-9444

Legal Aid 1-800-238-1443

1-800-238-1443

Tennessee Justice Center 615-255-0331
or call 1-877-608-1009 for free

615-255-0331

or call 1-877-608-1009 for free

Social Security 1-800-772-1213

1-800-772-1213

Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-7233

1-800-799-7233

Phone Numbers & Notes

Families First Guide

For more copies of this booklet, call:

Legal Aid Society
of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland

1-800-238-1443

On the internet at **www.las.org**

This booklet is not meant to take the place of legal advice. If you need legal advice about your Families First case, you may be able to get help from the legal services program in your area.

