How to find respite and a waiver, and not stop at one no.

Esta lección en español

What it is. **Respite** is care that gives you a break: a trained person watches your child for a few hours so you can sleep, work, or just breathe. A **waiver** is a state program, paid for through Medicaid, that can cover care at home, respite included, for a child with a disability. In many states it looks at the child's needs, not only the family's income.

Why it matters. A parent who never rests can't keep a plan going. Every state runs these programs a little differently, many have waitlists, and the first answer is often no. The families who get help are usually the ones who apply early, keep a paper trail, and appeal. You can start tonight.

HOW TO DO IT YOURSELF

How to ask for respite yourself, in five steps.

1. **Find your doors.** Search your state's name plus "Medicaid waiver children with disabilities" and "developmental disability services." In California the door is your local regional center. The ARCH National Respite Locator (archrespite.org) lists respite programs by state.
2. **Get on every list today.** If a waiver has a waitlist, the date you sign up is what moves you forward. Ask in writing to be put on it, and ask what date they have for you.
3. **Describe a hard day, not a diagnosis.** Write down what a normal day takes: how many hours your child needs an adult within arm's reach, how often you sleep

Free from DRAGEN. Learn it free at dragen.cloud/learn-respite. Free to print, copy and share for your own work, classroom or family; not for resale. Not affiliated with or endorsed by the BACB. General education, not medical or clinical advice for one person. Filled in, a sheet is a private record: store it like one. © 2026 Chase Alexander Hought.

through the night, what happened the last time you were alone with them all day. Programs pay for need. Show it.

4. **Get every answer in writing.** After each call, send a short email: “Today you told me ___. Please correct me if I got that wrong.” A no on the phone can’t be appealed. A no on paper can.
5. **Appeal the first no.** A written denial must tell you why and how to appeal, with a deadline. Mark the deadline the day the letter comes. Ask for the rule they used, and answer it with your hard-day notes.

If you are at the end of your rope tonight: call or text 988 (the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline) for yourself, or 911 if anyone is in danger. Asking for help is not failing your child.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Rosa and the second try.

Made-up example. The family, the program and the dates below are invented to show the method.

Rosa’s son Mateo is seven and up most nights. She asks her county’s disability office for respite.

What happened	What she did
On the phone she was told “he doesn’t qualify.”	Emailed the same day: “You told me Mateo doesn’t qualify. Please send that in writing with the reason.”

Free from DRAGEN. Learn it free at dragen.cloud/learn-respite. Free to print, copy and share for your own work, classroom or family; not for resale. Not affiliated with or endorsed by the BACB. General education, not medical or clinical advice for one person. Filled in, a sheet is a private record: store it like one. © 2026 Chase Alexander Hought.

The letter said “needs are met by the family.”	Wrote one page: Mateo sleeps 4 hours a night, needs an adult within arm’s reach all day, and she has not slept 6 hours in a row since spring.
The letter gave a deadline to appeal.	Filed before it, attached the page and a short note from his doctor.
Six weeks later	Approved for respite hours each month, and put on the waiver waitlist with the date of her first call.

What made it work: the first no was on the phone, so she got it on paper. Then she answered their reason with facts about a real day. Nothing about her son changed; her paper trail did.

MISTAKES TO AVOID

Ways families miss help.

- Waiting for a diagnosis or a better time to sign up. A waitlist only moves for people already on it.
- Taking a phone no as final. It isn’t a decision you can appeal until it is written down.
- Describing your best day. Programs read what you write. Write the hard day.
- Missing the appeal deadline. It can be short. Put it on the fridge.
- Thinking respite is selfish. A rested parent is part of your child’s plan.

TRY IT

Free from DRAGEN. Learn it free at dragen.cloud/learn-respite. Free to print, copy and share for your own work, classroom or family; not for resale. Not affiliated with or endorsed by the BACB. General education, not medical or clinical advice for one person. Filled in, a sheet is a private record: store it like one. © 2026 Chase Alexander Hought.

One question, then the answer.

A made-up case: Dana calls about respite. The worker says, “You make too much money for Medicaid.” What should Dana do next?

▼ Show the answer, and why

Ask for it in writing, and ask about waivers by name. Some state waivers and programs for children with disabilities look at the child’s needs, not the parents’ income. Dana should write back: “Please send me that decision in writing, and tell me which waivers you checked.” Why: a phone answer about one program is not a no from every program, and only a written answer can be appealed.

Something to keep

Fill in your tracker, then print it.

RESPITE AND WAIVER TRACKER · KEEP EVERY LETTER WITH THIS PAGE

Program

Who I spoke to	
Date I joined the list	
What a hard day takes	
What they told me	
Asked in writing on	
Appeal deadline	
Next step	Ask in writing. Appeal the first no.

Free from DRAGEN. Learn it free at dragen.cloud/learn-respite. Free to print, copy and share for your own work, classroom or family; not for resale. Not affiliated with or endorsed by the BACB. General education, not medical or clinical advice for one person. Filled in, a sheet is a private record: store it like one. © 2026 Chase Alexander Hought.

What DRAGEN can and can’t do.

DRAGEN does not provide respite and does not give legal advice. It can make the door easier to find. If you’re stuck, email chase@dragen.cloud and I’ll help you find the next door, free.

Free on this page, and yours to keep: the lesson and the printable tracker. No email, no login.

SOURCE

Where this comes from.

Home and community-based waivers: Social Security Act, section 1915(c) (Medicaid.gov, “Home & Community-Based Services 1915(c)”). California regional centers: the Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act, Welfare and Institutions Code section 4500 and following. Respite programs by state: ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center, archrespite.org.

Examples on this page are made up. They contain no client, student or family information. Programs differ by state; check yours. This lesson teaches a method; it is not legal advice and does not replace your case worker or an advocate.

Free from DRAGEN. Learn it free at dragen.cloud/learn-respite. Free to print, copy and share for your own work, classroom or family; not for resale. Not affiliated with or endorsed by the BACB. General education, not medical or clinical advice for one person. Filled in, a sheet is a private record: store it like one. © 2026 Chase Alexander Hought.