A free daycare app, or paper: what each does for parents

Peabody blog · Teaching · updated 2026-10-31

What a daycare app to communicate with parents really does, what paper does, and a free daycare log that keeps every child's day on your own device and sends nothing.

A daycare app for parents does four jobs: it tells families about the day, it takes messages, it shares photos, and it keeps records (check-in, billing). Paper does the first and the last for the price of a page. Peabody's daily log sits in between: a free daycare app that keeps each child's day on your own tablet or phone, prints it or saves it as a PDF at pick-up, and sends nothing anywhere. It is free through the end of 2026, with no account.

Most child care apps are built around a server: you type a child's day, the company stores it, and the family reads it on their phone. That's useful, and many programs are happy with one. It also means a company holds every child's name, naps, diapers, photos and pick-up list. This post sorts the jobs, so you can choose which ones you need an app for.

The four jobs

- Job: Tell families about the day · A parent app: In real time, on the parent's phone · Paper: A slip at pick-up · Peabody's daily log: A printed day, or a PDF you send yourself
- Job: Messages · A parent app: Inside the app · Paper: Notes in the cubby, talk at the door · Peabody's daily log: Not here: your own text or email
- Job: Photos · A parent app: Shared in the app · Paper: Printed and pasted · Peabody's daily log: Never taken in
- Job: Records (check-in, attendance) · A parent app: Stored by the company · Paper: A sign-in sheet in a binder · Peabody's daily log: The sign-in book, on your device

Billing is the one job a free tool here doesn't try: if you need automatic tuition payments, that's a payment company's work.

What the daily log does

You add the children once, by first name or initials; a full name is refused, so a lost tablet never carries one. Through the day you tap a child, then what happened:

- arrived and went home;
- meals (breakfast, lunch, snack, supper, with all, most, some or none), and bottles;
- nap started and woke up;
- diapers and potty;
- mood;

- what they did, and a short note.

The time fills itself, and you can change it if you log something late. At pick-up you print each child's day for the family, or the whole room's day for your records. To send it instead, choose "Save as PDF" in the print dialog and text or email the file yourself. Peabody never sends anything.

There's no medicine line. A medication record is your program's own form under your licensing rules, so the day sheet says Medication: see our log, and a blank medication log prints from logs and postings.

Where the data lives

Only in the browser on the device you use. That's the point and the catch:

- The point: no company has a copy, so there's nothing to leak, sell or be asked for.
- The catch: there's only one copy. Save the log as a file now and then from export and import my office, which also moves everything to a new tablet.

Pick one device per room. Two tablets don't share a log, because nothing goes to a server to share it through.

When a paid app is the better choice

Be honest with yourself about these:

- Families expect photos during the day, and your program allows it.
- Several staff in different rooms need to see the same child's day at once.
- You want tuition paid automatically through the same app.

If those matter, a paid app earns its price. Our Top 10 of child care management apps lists the prices each vendor published on its own page, with no affiliate links.

When paper still wins

A small home program, a room where the changing table is no place for a phone, or a family who reads the slip in the car: the case for paper is in our post on the daily sheet, paper or app. The printed daily report slips come four to a page for infants, toddlers or preschoolers.

A middle path

Many providers end up here: the daily log on one tablet for the day, a printed day for each family at pick-up, the sign-in book by the door, and texts for the urgent things. Everything a family needs reaches them; nothing about their child sits on someone else's server.

And at home, a family can read a short story together after pick-up: the open library is free to read with no account.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/free-daycare-app-or-paper