

Frequently asked questions for parents

The main things you need to know

What entitlements are available and which ones might I be able to use?

There are several different entitlements available, which have different eligibility criteria. These are set out below.

Entitlement	Child's age	Eligibility	What you can receive	How to apply
Working parents entitlement	From the term after they turn 9 months until they start school	For working parents - explained here	15 hours per week over 38 weeks of the year. Can be combined with the universal entitlement for 3- and 4-year-olds to make up 30 hours.	Speak to your chosen childcare provider about if they can offer a place. You apply online here on Gov.uk . Applications for children aged from 9 months open on 12 May, 2024.
For parents of 2 year olds receiving some additional forms of government support	From the term after they turn 2-years-old	Explained here	15 hours per week over 38 weeks of the year.	Speak to your chosen childcare provider about if they can offer a place. Speak to your local authority about free childcare places for eligible two year olds. You may be able to find advice online on your local authority's website .
Universal entitlement for 3- and 4-year-olds	From the term after they turn 3-years old through to starting school	All 3- and 4-year-olds are eligible	15 hours per week over 38 weeks of the year. Can be combined with the working parents entitlement to make up 30 hours.	Speak to your chosen childcare provider about if they can offer a place, and take them your child's birth certificate.

Your provider may agree to 'stretch' your entitlement by using fewer hours over more than 38 weeks per year. Check with your childcare provider to find out if this is something they offer.

It is not possible to use more than 15 hours (or 30, if your child is 3 or 4) in a week, but you don't have to use your full entitlement if you don't want to.

When can I use the entitlements from?

You can start using your entitlements from the *term after* your child turns the relevant age to use that entitlement. The relevant age for the working parent entitlement is 9 months old.

When your child turns the relevant age	When they can get their hours from
1 January to 31 March	Term starting on or after 1 April
1 April to 31 August (Applications open 12 May in 2024 as part of transitional arrangements)	Term starting on or after 1 September
1 September to 31 December	Term starting on or after 1 January

You are only able to claim the entitlements from the term after they become the relevant age because this gives local authorities and childcare providers enough time to prepare. If you're not working when your child turns the relevant age for the working parent entitlement, you may have to wait until the term after you start working to be eligible.

How do I apply for the working parents entitlement?

You apply online here on [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

You'll need to make sure you have the following information to hand before starting the application:

- your national insurance number (or unique taxpayer reference if you are self-employed).
- the date you started or are due to start work.
- details of any government support or benefits you receive.
- the UK birth certificate reference number (if you have one) for your child.

For children from 9 months old (aged between 9- and 23-months old on 31st August) parents can apply from 12 May to receive 15 hours childcare starting from September 2024. We have ensured the HMRC helplines will be open on 12 May if you choose to apply then and experience any difficulties.

If you are a foster carer, there is a separate application process. Speak to your social worker to find out more.

When do I need to apply?

We recommend you contact your chosen provider as early as possible to secure your place.

You will be able to take up your free hours from the *term after* you meet all the eligibility criteria for the entitlement you are applying for. These terms begin on 1 January, 1 April and 1 September.

You need to apply on [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) before the deadline to receive a code for free childcare to give to your childcare provider. The deadline is the day before the new term begins, but we encourage you to apply earlier, and recommend applying at least 6 weeks before the deadline. Some providers may ask for codes before the deadline, so we recommend you speak to your provider to find out if this is the case.

The deadlines are:

When you would like to use your entitlements from	The deadline to apply for a code
1 January	31 December
1 April	31 March
1 September	31 August

If you do not apply by the deadline, you will not be able to take up your entitlements in that term.

For parents applying for free childcare starting in September 2024:

It's important to remember that codes need to be reconfirmed every three months, so parents applying any time before 1 June will need to reconfirm their code prior to the offer starting in September.

For children from 9 months old (aged between 9- and 23-months old on 31st August) parents can apply from 12 May. There is no limit on the number of codes available, so you don't have to apply on 12 May itself.

We recommend, however, that you reach out now to your preferred provider to check by when they will require your code and that you apply by the start of the school summer holidays.

When will I find out if I am eligible?

When you apply you may find out if you're eligible straight away, but it can take longer if you need to provide further information.

Once your application has been approved, you'll get a code for free childcare to give to your childcare provider.

What happens once I receive my code?

You'll need to take the code to your childcare provider, along with your National Insurance Number and your child's date of birth.

Your childcare provider will check the code and then allocate your child a place if available.

We recommend parents speak with their chosen provider about when they will be able to offer them a place.

We know that some providers are able to amend invoices if they have issued them before a parent has received their code, so we recommend you speak to your provider if you are in this situation.

What are the eligibility criteria I need to meet to claim the 15 or 30 hours free childcare for working parents?

Working parents in England who each earn the equivalent of at least 16 hours per week at the National Minimum Wage are eligible.

From April 2024, you're eligible if you earn at least:

Your age	Yearly	3 Months	Monthly	Weekly
21 and over	£9,518	£2,379	£793	£183
18 to 20	£7,155	£1,788	£596	£137
Under 18 or an apprentice	£5,324	£1,331	£443	£102

You can earn up to £100,000 [adjusted net income](#) per year and be eligible. If you have a partner who lives with you, they must also earn between these two amounts. The £100,000 adjusted net income level was chosen to correspond with income tax thresholds. See our [eligibility criteria](#) for more information, including the income requirements for those who are self-employed.

How is my eligibility calculated?

Eligibility is calculated on an individual basis rather than by household. This means if you have a partner who lives with you, you must both individually earn between these two amounts. There is an exception to this if you are in a couple and one person is claiming one of the following benefits:

- Carer's Allowance
- Incapacity Benefit
- Severe Disablement Allowance
- Contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance or
- Certain additional elements of Universal Credit

In which case you may still be eligible.

Can I apply for a code whilst I am on maternity, paternity or adoption leave?

If you are applying for childcare for an older child, who is not the subject of the parental leave, you can apply as normal.

You can also apply for the child that is the subject of the parental leave, though when you return to work will affect when you can take up the childcare. If you plan to return to work from parental leave or start a new job by the end of September 2024, you can apply for a free childcare code from 12 May at the same time as everyone else.

Parents in this situation will need to apply online as normal but will then receive a letter in the post within 1 to 2 weeks, enabling them to access their entitlement.

From 1st October, the below dates will apply:

Date of starting or returning work	When you can apply from	When you can access your entitlements from
1 October to 31 January	1 September to 31 December	1 January
1 February to 30 April	1 January to 31 March	1 April
1 May to 31 September	1 April to 31 August	1 September

I have an existing Tax-Free Childcare account and the timing of my reconfirmation window means I can't apply for a code on 12 May. What do I do?

If you have needed to reconfirm your eligibility for Tax-Free Childcare before 12 May and won't have another reconfirmation window opening until after the 9th June, you will receive a letter from HMRC containing a valid temporary code and instructions on how to use it to claim your entitlement. If you haven't received your letter by 24 May, you should contact HMRC.

Please make sure that all your contact details on your childcare account are up to date, so that we can contact you if we need to about your childcare. These letters should be with affected parents by 24 May, well in advance of provider deadlines.

There is no need to contact HMRC before 24th May, unless you haven't received your letter by that date. In due course, you will also need to reconfirm your digital code as normal through your Childcare Account when your reconfirmation window opens, and you should then take your digital code to your provider.

What if my reconfirmation window opens before the 9th June?

Some parents with existing Tax-Free Childcare accounts may have reconfirmation windows opening before 9th June. If this is you, you will not receive a letter as your reconfirmation window will open in good time for you to register for a code digitally and give it to your provider. We're confident that all parents will be able to get codes by the time they need them, and there is no limit on the number of codes available.

I have received two codes, one from the letter and one from the website. Which one am I supposed to use?

If you have two codes, one from your letter beginning with 11 and one from the website beginning with 50, please give your provider the code from the website beginning with 50, as this is your permanent digital code for your child. If you only have one code (beginning with 11) then you can use this code to start using your entitlements. Please remember that if you used a temporary code beginning with 11, that once your reconfirmation window opens, you will still need to reconfirm your eligibility through your Childcare Account and share the digital code (beginning with 50) that you will receive at that time with your provider.

If I'm eligible for Universal Credit can I get the new entitlements?

Yes, if you meet the eligibility criteria. Whilst you cannot claim Universal Credit and Tax-Free Childcare at the same time, those on Universal Credit will still be able to claim the working parents entitlement, as long as they meet the [eligibility criteria](#).

This will not affect your ability to claim Universal Credit. If you are taking up more than 15 hours childcare (or 30 hours if you are also using the universal entitlement), you can claim Universal Credit Childcare, which can support you with up to 85% of the cost of additional childcare you pay for outside your entitlement to 15 hours. Please see [the Universal Credit childcare costs page](#) for more information.

Alternatively, there is a separate entitlement which means that parents of 2 year olds who are already receiving [some additional forms of government support](#), such as Universal Credit or tax credits, can receive 15 hours of early education, including childcare. This is separate from the new entitlement for working parents.

All parents regardless of employment status, family circumstances, or income levels are eligible for the universal 15 hours for 3- and 4-year-olds.

How often do I need to log into my childcare account?

You need to log into your childcare account every 3 months to reconfirm that your details are up to date and that you remain eligible for the childcare entitlements for working parents and/or Tax-Free Childcare.

Will I be reminded to reconfirm my details?

Yes, you will receive a reminder:

- when your reconfirmation window opens
- a week before your reconfirmation deadline
- and on your reconfirmation deadline.

This message will come from HMRC. Please remember to make sure that your details are up to date.

How long does reconfirmation usually take?

In most cases, reconfirmation should only take a few minutes, but it may take longer if you need to provide further information.

How do I log into my childcare account to reconfirm?

You need to log into your childcare account using your Government Gateway ID to reconfirm. The dates between which you should reconfirm will be displayed when you log in.

What's happening in September 2025?

In September 2025, the 15 hours for working parents of children under 3 will expand to 30 hours, meaning eligible working parents will be able to claim 30 hours of childcare all the way through from the term after their child turns 9 months to school age.

What if the provider I want to use says they don't have a place available?

If your chosen provider doesn't have a place available, we advise that you explore other providers in your local area.

Your local authority can provide support with finding a free place [in your area](#).

Eligibility – Working Parents Entitlement

What if I am a foster carer?

Children in foster care who are aged 9 months to 4-years-old could also be eligible for the working parent entitlements, provided the foster parent is in paid work outside their fostering role and does not expect their adjusted net income to exceed £100,000.

There is no minimum income requirement for foster parents, however the local authority who is responsible for the child must confirm it is satisfied that the foster parent's paid work other than their fostering role is consistent with the child's care plan.

Foster parents cannot use the online Childcare Service application to get free childcare. Speak to your social worker and your [local council](#) if you want to apply.

What if I am a student?

Students who work in addition to studying are eligible for this entitlement if they meet the income requirements.

Students who do not work are not eligible, but other schemes are available for those in further or higher education. If you're a full-time student, you may be eligible for [help with your childcare costs](#). Further information can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/help-with-childcare-costs/support-while-you-study>

I missed out on the working parent entitlement because of a computer glitch

If you are eligible for the working parents entitlement but were unable to take up a free place in time due to a technical issue with your application. [You may be eligible for compensation if](#), for example:

- you applied before the deadline but your code has a start which is on/after the start of the term, or
- you were unable to reconfirm your eligibility due to a system error.

What are the immigration requirements for the parents?

You must have a national insurance number to apply. If you have a partner who lives with you, they must also have a national insurance number. If you are the parent who is making the application you must have **at least one** of the following:

- British or Irish citizenship
- [Settled or pre-settled status](#), or you have applied and you're waiting for a decision.
- Permission to access public funds – your UK residence card will tell you if you can't do this.

What about if I'm disabled, claim Personal Independence Payments or have caring responsibilities?

If you, or your partner is unable to work because you get one of the following benefits, you could still be eligible for the working parent entitlement as long as you have a partner who is working and meets the eligibility criteria:

- Carer's Allowance
- Incapacity Benefit
- Severe Disablement Allowance
- contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance or
- Certain additional elements of Universal Credit

However, if you are a single parent on one of these benefits you will also need to be working and meet the income requirements to be eligible for the working parents entitlement.

Claiming Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment for yourself or your child does not automatically grant you eligibility to use this entitlement. You would still need to be working and meet the [income requirements](#) in order to claim it.

However, parents who are already receiving [some additional forms of government support](#), can receive 15 hours of funded early education, including childcare, for 2-year-olds. This is separate from the new entitlement for working parents and is available to parents whose child is entitled to Disability Living Allowance. All parents regardless of employment status or income levels are eligible for the universal 15 hours for 3- and 4-year-olds.

Using the working parent entitlements

What do the entitlements cover?

Government funding is to deliver your 15 or 30 hours of free, high quality, flexible childcare. It does not cover additional hours, activities or extra costs, such as meals. Your provider should provide invoices and receipts that are clear, transparent and itemised to see you have received your child's free entitlements and understand any fees for additional hours or services.

You may have to pay for, or provide your own:

- Meals
- Other consumables, like nappies
- Additional hours

Additional services or activities, like trips.

However, charges for consumables or additional hours should not be made a condition of accessing a free place.

You should not be charged:

- A top-up fee
- A non-refundable registration fee.

You may wish to speak to your local authority or your provider about any additional charges on top of the funded childcare hours, including any alternative options they offer.

What about if I wish to start using them later, or if my child is already older than 9 months?

If you wish to use your entitlements later than the term after your child turns the relevant age, then you can apply closer to the time you wish to start. Provided you still meet the eligibility criteria for that entitlement at that time, you will not lose your ability to apply.

Can I use the entitlements for a nanny?

No, you are not able to use the entitlements for a nanny or a home carer.

Can I use the entitlements for childcare with a relative?

No. You cannot use the entitlements for free hours of childcare provided by a relative, such as a grandparent.

Reconfirming your eligibility for the working parents entitlement

Can I add another child to my account between reconfirmation windows?

Yes, a parent who is already using the childcare service for another child can add a new child to their account at any time.

What happens if I miss my reconfirmation window?

If you miss your reconfirmation window, your eligibility for Tax-Free Childcare and/or your childcare entitlements will lapse. However, if your child is already in a place a grace period for your free childcare will apply. This means your child can continue in their place for a short time, but you need to submit another application as soon as you can to keep getting the childcare entitlements and/or Tax-Free Childcare.

When can I submit a new application if I missed my reconfirmation window or fell out of eligibility?

You can submit a new application any time you meet the eligibility criteria for childcare entitlements or Tax-Free Childcare. You must then present your code to your provider to confirm your place can continue.

Entitlement for parents of 2-year-olds receiving some additional forms of government support

What can I get with this entitlement?

Parents of 2-year-olds who are already receiving [some additional forms of government support](#) can also receive up to 15 hours a week, over 38 weeks of the year, of fully funded early education. This includes childcare. This is separate from the new entitlement for working parents. Speak to your local council about free childcare places for eligible 2-year-olds. You may be able to find advice online on [your local authority's website](#).

What forms of government support make me eligible for this entitlement?

Your 2-year-old can get free childcare if you live in England and get any of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Universal Credit, and your household income is £15,400 a year or less after tax, not including benefit payments
- The guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit (or both), and your household income is £16,190 a year or less before tax
- The Working Tax Credit 4-week run on (the payment you get when you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit)

You can also apply for this entitlement if your 2-year old:

- is looked after by a local authority
- has an education, health and care (EHC) plan
- gets Disability Living Allowance
- has left care under an adoption order, special guardianship order or a child arrangements order

What about if I am not a UK citizen and have no recourse to public funds?

Some households that have no recourse to public funds may be eligible for this entitlement for their 2-year-old. Please see [this page](#) for more information.

What if I'm eligible for two entitlements?

You cannot use the working parents entitlement and the entitlement for families receiving some additional forms of support at the same time for the same child. Families of 2-year-olds who meet the eligibility criteria for both offers should apply only for the entitlement for families receiving some additional forms of government support, which avoids the need to reconfirm entitlement every 3 months.

This will change in September 2025, when the working parent entitlement expands to 30 hours. Parents of two year olds who are eligible for both entitlements will be able to claim 15 hours from each entitlement.

Universal 15 hours for all 3- & 4-year-olds

Who can get the universal entitlement?

All 3- and 4-year-olds who live in England are entitled to this offer irrespective of your income levels, benefit status, or family circumstances.

What can I get in the universal entitlement?

All those aged 3 to starting school in England can get 570 free hours per year through this entitlement. It's usually taken as 15 hours a week for 38 weeks of the year, but you can choose to take fewer hours over more weeks if your childcare provider offers this option.

When can I use this entitlement?

You can get it from the 1 January, 1 April or 1 September after your child's 3rd birthday.

Contact your childcare provider or [local council](#) to find out more.

Can I combine the universal entitlement with the working parents entitlement to receive 30 hours of childcare?

Yes.

How do I apply for this entitlement?

Take your child's birth certificate and speak to your chosen provider.

Support you can use along with your entitlements

What other support is available?

You can also apply for [Tax-Free Childcare](#) or [Universal Credit childcare](#). You cannot use both of these at the same time.

What is Tax Free Childcare?

[Tax-Free Childcare](#) can be used to help pay for any additional hours above the hours you are claiming through your entitlements. It can also be used to pay for certain additional services that are charged by your provider. You pay into the account, and HMRC will top up this amount by 20%, up to a value of £2,000 per year, or up to £4,000 per year if your child is disabled.

What is Universal Credit childcare?

[Universal Credit](#) can help with the costs of childcare. You may be able to claim up to 85 per cent of your childcare costs if you're eligible for Universal Credit and meet some additional conditions.

What can I use these support offers for?

You may be able to use these other forms of support to help pay for childcare that is not covered through the entitlements. For example, you can use it to help pay for any additional hours, or to pay for a nanny if your nanny has registered on the Voluntary

part of the General Childcare Register. It can also be used to pay for certain additional services that are charged by your provider.

Is there any support I can get for my provider to help my child?

Yes. The Early Years Pupil Premium is additional funding for your provider to support children whose families get certain benefits. Its purpose is to enhance learning and development support for children, ultimately improving their outcomes.

You can find out more about this on this page: [Get extra funding for your early years provider](#)

Is there any support for my provider to help my disabled child?

Yes. Disability access funding is a grant given each year to providers to help children with disabilities get the best support during their early education. If you get Disability Living Allowance for your child, then they are eligible for this funding.

If you think your child may be eligible for disability access funding speak to your childcare provider or [local council](#).