

Help with childcare costs – free childcare and education in England

Early learning and childcare gives children the chance to explore the world around them, make friends, socialise, and be ready for school. Childcare also gives parents like you a chance to work, study, get things done at home or just have a break. Childcare can be expensive though, and many parents worry that they can't afford to use pre-school childcare. However, there is help available towards the costs of childcare.

Three and four year olds in England can get up to 15 hours a week free childcare for 38 weeks of the year. Some nurseries may allow you to spread fewer hours a week across the whole year. You can use these free hours at most schools and nurseries in the private and voluntary sector, or with a registered childminder. You should not be charged for these free hours. You cannot be forced to take up additional hours, or pay for extras but you can choose to pay for more time if you need it.

From September, this will be extended to 30 hours per week for some three and four year olds.

Eligibility

Three and four year olds: All children can take up 15 hours in the term following their third birthday. To qualify for 30 hours per week, both parents, or one parent in a lone parent household, must be working at least 16 hours a week on minimum or living wage and earn less than £100,000 per year. If one parent is not working, then you'll only be able to obtain the standard 15 hours a week.

Two year olds: You can take up these free hours if your family is claiming certain benefits such as Disability Living Allowance or tax credits and have an annual salary of £16,190 or less. Two year olds are also entitled to a place if they're looked after by a local council, have left care (under a special guardianship order, child arrangements order or adoption order) or they have a current statement of special education needs (or an education health and care plan).

To check whether your child is eligible for a place or if you need further advice or information about the free places, speak to your local authority Family Information Service. Family Information Services hold local information about all registered and some informal childcare. They can advise you if you can't find suitable childcare, how to get help with your childcare costs as well as support you in finding childcare if your child has special educational needs or disabilities.

You can find details of your local Family Information Service by searching at:
www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/finder.

The Family and Childcare Trust is the leading national charity in the field of policy, research and advocacy on childcare and family issues, working closely with government, local authorities, businesses and charities to achieve positive and long lasting change for families across the UK. Our vision is a society where all families are well-supported and have genuine choices about their lives.

The Family and Childcare Trust's annual childcare costs survey is the definitive report on childcare costs and sufficiency in the UK and its data are used by the Department for Education.

For further information, please go to www.familyandchildcaretrust.org

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