



# Free childcare and early education for under fives

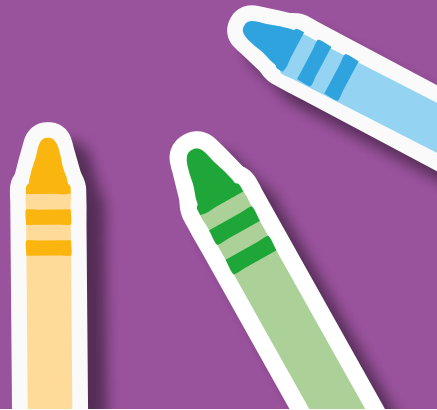
Can I get free childcare? Your child's age or your family circumstances will affect when you can get free childcare.

From 2024 even more families will be eligible.

For more details see inside.

Information  
for Parents

Valid until March 2025.



# Introduction

**We want all children in Newcastle to benefit from high quality childcare and early education.**

- Childcare can give your child a great start in life
- Playing and exploring will help your child learn lots of new skills such as speaking, listening and counting
- You'll have time to work, train or just time for yourself

Every child is entitled to some free childcare before they start school, for instance all three-and-four-year-olds are entitled to at least 15 hours per week (for 38 weeks per year). How much and when varies according to your child's age and your circumstances.

From 2024 some children will be eligible for free childcare from nine-months-old.

In addition, you can also receive some support to subsidise the cost of paid for childcare for instance through Tax-Free Childcare, Tax Credits, Universal Credit or Student Support. We hope this guide helps.

The vast majority of childcare in Newcastle is judged Outstanding or Good by Ofsted. You can choose a childminder, school, pre-school playgroup or day nursery either term time or all year-round whatever suits your family's needs.

You can also get extra support and funding if your child has additional needs or a disability.

This guide should help you find out what you may be entitled to. Throughout the guide we use **childcare** to mean all early education and childcare and **provider** to refer to all kinds of childcare or school.

# What is free childcare?

Free childcare refers to the 15 or 30 hours that families are eligible through the routes we will explain. The Government funds these hours over 38 weeks of the year only (we call this term time). If you want hours over more than 38 weeks, please discuss this with your provider.

While we use the term free, we recognise that there may be optional extras that parents choose to pay for, such as extra hours, meals or activities. However, no parent should be required to pay a top-up charge if they just want to access their free hours. But remember settings may have set session lengths and rules in place about how you can take your free hours. Some providers will have waiting lists.

## When do you qualify?

Age of child	All families	Families receiving some additional support*	Working parents**	Working parents** from Sept 2025
Nine-month-olds	No	Some 15 hours from September 2024	Most 15 hours from September 2024	Most 30 hours
Two-year olds	No	Most 15 hours already	Most 15 hours from April 2024	Most 30 hours
Three-and-four-year-olds	Yes 15 hours	All 15 hours (some 30 hours)	Most 30 hours some 15 hours	No change

\* See criteria for two-year-old funding (see page 6 & 7)

\*\* See criteria for working parents (see page 9)

# When is my child eligible and when can I apply?

Irrespective of the funding route you are applying or eligible for, your child becomes eligible the term AFTER they reach that age. See tables below:

A child born between* or turns nine months between	Will become eligible from	Apply from
1 April – 31 August	Start of Autumn term (September)	1 January
1 September – 31 December	Start of Spring term (January)	1 April
1 January – 31 March	Start of Summer term (after Easter holidays)	1 September

New entitlements for the working parent from April 2024 can apply from 2 January to 31 March. The Government has not given a date for September 2024 entitlements yet.

If your child is eligible from nine-months-old, the table below may help:

Child born between	Turns nine months between	Eligible Term	Apply from
1 July – 30 November	1 April – 31 August	Autumn	1 January
1 December – 31 March	1 September – 31 December	Spring	1 April
1 April – 30 June	1 January – 31 March	Summer	1 September

\*This refers to two-, three-and-four-year-olds.

# Where can you use your free childcare?

You can use any Ofsted registered provider:

- Childminder
- Pre-school playgroup
- Day nursery
- Nursery school or nursery class in a school
- Some out of school clubs



For a full list visit [www.newcastlesupportdirectory.org.uk](http://www.newcastlesupportdirectory.org.uk) or scan the QR code

# How can you use your free childcare?

You can use childcare at times that suit you, including weekends. Some providers are more flexible, for instance a childminder. Others offer hours in 3- or 5-hour sessions within the following limits:

- No more than 10 hours a day
- Not before 6am or after 8pm
- Up to 3 different providers but no more than 2 sites per day

You should discuss with your childcare provider:

- How they offer the hours
- How you can take the free hours only
- Availability of a place
- If you want to pay for extra hours
- If there are any charges for optional extras such as food etc

# Free childcare for two-year-olds – for families receiving some additional forms of Government support

Many two-year-olds in Newcastle are eligible for 15 hours free childcare. We send golden tickets to families who we know are eligible, but circumstances change all the time so if you are not sure, check if you are eligible with your local provider.

This is sometimes referred to as the disadvantaged entitlement.

## Who is eligible?

Families are eligible where:

- You are on a low income (see below) and in receipt of benefits or
- Your child is looked after by the council or has left care through adoption, special guardianship, or child arrangements order (previously residence order) or
- Your child receives Disability Living Allowance or has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

## Low-income criteria – parents need to meet one of the following:

1. Receiving any of these benefits - Income support, Income-based Job Seekers' Allowance, Income-related ESA or
2. Receiving Universal Credit - if you and your partner have a combined income from work of less than £15,400 a year after tax;
3. Receiving the Guarantee elements of the State Pension Credit;
4. Receiving support under Part 6 of Immigration & Asylum Act 1999;
5. Receiving Child Tax Credit, and have annual gross income of no more than £16,190, as assessed by HMRC;
6. Receiving Working Tax Credit with a household income of less than £16,190 as assessed by HMRC;
7. Non-UK citizen who cannot claim benefits (depends on earnings).

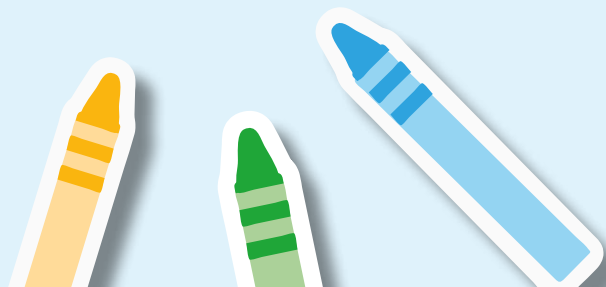
## How do you apply or find out if you are eligible?


Visit your local childcare provider who can check if you are eligible. If you have a golden ticket letter, take this with you as this will help. They will need information about your child as well as your National Insurance or National Asylum Support Service number, your date of birth and contact details.

If you work and your income fluctuates, you may need to appeal to show average earnings over three months.

If you are eligible through another route, then you also need to take evidence of:

- Your child's Disability Living Allowance award or
- An adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order.





# Free childcare for three-and-four-year-olds (universal entitlement)

All three-and-four-year-olds are entitled to 15 hours childcare per week until they start a school reception class.

To apply visit the provider you wish to use.



# Free childcare for working parents (from nine months to school age)

During 2024 the entitlement for working parents is expanding.

Currently three-and-four-year-olds of working parents may be entitled to an additional 15 hours free childcare (30 hours in total) each week – this is called the extended entitlement.

From **April 2024**, eligible working parents with children aged two will have access to 15 hours childcare.

From **September 2024**, the 15 hours childcare will expand to eligible working parents with children from nine-months-old.

## Who is eligible?

Working parents where:

- Both parents (or sole parent in one parent family) are working\* and earn on average at least the equivalent of 16 hours at the national minimum wage\*\* and less than £100,000 or
- As above where one parent is working, and the second parent is not working but receiving an eligible carer benefit or is unable to work and receiving an eligible disability benefit.
- Parent(s) continue to be eligible every 3 months and reconfirm this online (using the Government Gateway explained later).

\* working includes parents who are on maternity, paternity, adoption or sick leave and where a parent expects to be working (for instance are starting a new job)

\*\*minimum wages rates vary for different age groups and change every April. April 2024 minimum wage for 21 and over is £11.44 per hour, £183.04 per week or £9,518.08 per year. <https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates>

## Eligible example

You and your partner both work (both earning less than £100,000). You work 38 hours per week and your partner works 12 hours per week at £16 an hour, therefore earning £192.00 per week. This is more than the £183.04 threshold\* and you are therefore eligible for the free childcare provision.

\*This threshold is based on national minimum wage of £11.44 for over 21s, correct as of April 2024.

## Ineligible example

You are a single parent and receive incapacity benefit. Unfortunately, you are ineligible as the Government only funds this entitlement when a parent is working.

However, if you are part of a couple in the above circumstance and your partner is working (and meets the working parent criteria) then you would be eligible.



## How do you apply for free childcare?

- You need to apply online at [www.childcarechoices.gov.uk](http://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk)
- You will need to set up a Government Gateway account which might take some time, so do this as early as possible.
- See tables on page 4 'When is my child eligible and when can I apply?'
- You will get an eligibility code which you must give to your provider before the start of your child's eligible term.
- For working parent entitlements, you must reconfirm your eligibility (code) every 3 months via the Government Gateway.
- If you cannot access the internet, you can ring **0300 123 4097**.

# Frequently asked questions

## My child has additional needs or a disability?

All providers must ensure your child has full access to free childcare and offer support if they have a disability or additional needs. They can apply to the Inclusion Fund if a child needs a higher ratio of staffing, specific equipment or resources. They will discuss this with you or other professionals involved.

Providers can receive an annual payment called Disability Access Fund for all three-or-four-year-olds in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA). This supports providers in being more inclusive. If your child receives DLA, please let your provider have a copy of the award letter.

## Will you have to pay anything?

Your child's free childcare place should be entirely free. If you are only taking your free hours, you should not be expected to pay for additional hours, services, pay a registration fee or charged in advance for your free hours.

But providers offer free hours in different ways and also offer additional optional extra services, for example:

- Buying extra hours above your entitlement
- Food (but there should be an option to provide a packed lunch)

## How do you ensure you remain eligible for your free childcare?

For universal entitlement (15 hours for all three-and-four-year-olds) and for the disadvantaged entitlement (15 hours for some two-year-olds) once eligible you remain eligible.

For the working entitlements only, you are required to log in to the Government Gateway every 3 months to reconfirm you meet the working parent criteria. If you fail to do this, or no longer meet the criteria, you may lose the entitlement. However, there will be a grace period (i.e. you will not lose entitlement immediately). You can discuss this with your provider.

## What if you have a concern about quality?

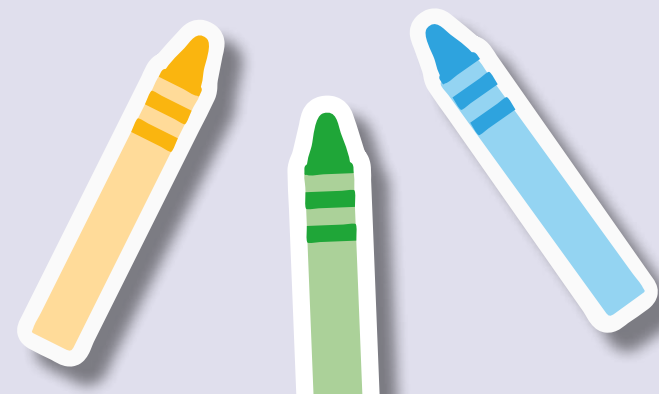
If you are concerned about the quality of your provider, you should raise the issue with the manager first. If you do not feel your concern has been resolved or you are still unhappy then you need to contact Ofsted directly on **0300 123 4666**

## What if you have a concern regarding my free childcare?

You should take this up with your provider first. If you wish to make a complaint about your free childcare offer, contact: **complaints@newcastle.gov.uk**

## Who pays the provider?

You will not be expected to pay for your 15 or 30 free hours. This is paid to the provider directly by the provider's local council.



### What about the school holidays?

Some providers are open all year round and you can discuss with them “stretching” your free hours over more weeks of the year. For instance if you are entitled to 15 hours per week for 38 weeks this is 570 hours a year or approximately 11 hours if taken over 51 weeks.

### Other support for childcare costs

As well as free childcare parents can get help with childcare costs:

- Tax-free childcare is for working families and can pay for 20% of childcare costs for children aged 0 to 16 years.
- Tax credits for childcare can pay up to 70% of childcare costs for those in receipt of tax credits.
- Universal Credit for childcare can pay up to 85% of childcare costs for those in receipt of Universal Credit.
- Students can get help from Care to Learn if under 20 and apply for Learning Support if at college or Childcare Grant if in higher education.

Visit childcare choices to find out more  
[www.childcarechoices.gov.uk](http://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk)



## Starting or changing childcare provider mid-term:

### Notice period for funding hours\*

Children who move or leave settings mid-term must give their current provider four weeks' notice. If you fail to give notice, we will pay them four weeks' notice and you will not be able to start a new provider.

### Mid-term starts

Children eligible for universal entitlement (15 hours for three-and-four-year-olds) or two-year-olds (disadvantaged entitlement) can start mid-term usually the Monday following application.

For working parent entitlements, if you become eligible (and get an eligibility code) mid-term you are eligible from the following term, unless you successfully appeal.

\*Providers may have different notice periods for any paid for hours.





# More information from:

## Childcare Choices

[www.childcarechoices.gov.uk](http://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk)  
0300 123 4097

## Newcastle Support directory

[www.newcastlesupportdirectory.org.uk](http://www.newcastlesupportdirectory.org.uk)

## Newcastle City Council

[www.newcastle.gov.uk/freechildcare](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/freechildcare)

## Early Help in Newcastle

At times some children and families require additional support.

If you would like to know about support available visit:

[www.newcastle.gov.uk/earlyhelp](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/earlyhelp)

You may also get support from your local Family Hub, health visitor or other professionals you have contact with.

**Don't forget you could be missing out on the free childcare you are entitled to.**

