

A guide to available support for childcare and early years education

Find out about support to help give your child the best start in life and make juggling work and family life easier for you.



Childcare and early years education can help children learn and develop. From making friends to sharing toys, these experiences build the independence and skills they need for school. With qualified professionals caring for them, you can have peace of mind as they grow.

Support available for your family

30 hours childcare – save up to £7,500 a year

Working parents with children aged 9 months to school age could get 30 hours childcare per week, over 38 weeks a year. That's worth up to £7,500 a year.

You could be eligible if:

- You and your partner (if you have one) each earn the equivalent of 16 hours a week at National Minimum or Living Wage
- You each earn less than £100,000 a year (adjusted net income)

You may still be eligible if one parent meets the criteria but the other receives certain benefits.

15 hours childcare for 3 and 4 year olds

All parents of 3 and 4 year olds can get 15 hours childcare per week over 38 weeks of the year, regardless of income levels or benefit status.

Speak with your provider or local council to apply.

Early learning for 2 year olds

If you receive certain benefits like Universal Credit, or your child has an Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plan, your 2 year old can get 15 hours of early learning per week over 38 weeks per year. Giving them a head start in learning can be great for their future.

Speak with your provider or local council to apply.



How to apply for 30 hours childcare

1. Visit **BestStartinLife.gov.uk** to check what support you could get.
2. Speak to your chosen provider about how to use your 30 hours and any optional extras. Contact your local authority's Family Information Service to find a childcare provider.
3. Apply online at **gov.uk/free-childcare-if-working**. You'll need your National Insurance number (or Unique Taxpayer Reference if self-employed), work start date, details of benefits you receive, and your child's UK birth certificate reference number (if available).

Apply by:

- **31 March to use it from 1 April**
- **31 August to use it from 1 September**
- **31 December to use it from 1 January**

4. You will get a code within seven days, but it may come immediately. Give your code to your provider.
5. Reconfirm your details on your GOV.UK account every 3 months.



Using your 30 hours childcare

You can start using your hours the term after your child turns 9 months old. Terms start on 1 January, 1 April, and 1 September.

You can use your hours alongside Tax-Free Childcare or Universal Credit Childcare, and use providers like nurseries, childminders and pre-schools. You can also find out more about Tax-Free Childcare and Universal Credit Childcare at **BestStartinLife.gov.uk**.

You may be asked to pay for optional extras such as meals or nappies, but these cannot be a condition of accessing your support.

Help your child get ready to start school

Preparing your child for school is a team effort. The little things you do at home – chatting, playing, and reading together – combined with qualified early learning, give your child the foundation they need to thrive at school. Early learning helps children to:

- Build confidence and independence
- Develop language and social skills
- Learn through play with qualified professionals

Primary school childcare support is expanding

Before and after school childcare, also known as **wraparound childcare**, is expanding. If eligible, you can use Tax-Free Childcare or Universal Credit Childcare to help to pay for it. **Free breakfast clubs** are also being rolled out to help children start the day ready to learn.

Family support in your local area

Best Start Family Hubs are a one-stop place for families to get advice, support and community connections, from pregnancy and your child's health to childcare and early learning and beyond. Up to 1,000 Best Start Family Hubs to be rolled out from April 2026.

Find your nearest Family Hub at **BestStartinLife.gov.uk**.

Find out what support you could get

Visit **BestStartinLife.gov.uk** or scan the QR code to learn more about early years education & childcare support.



Welcome to Best Start in Life

Whether you're newly pregnant or navigating your child's early years, the *Best Start in Life* hub offers clear, government approved guidance every step of the way.

Find trusted advice on pregnancy, feeding and weaning, understanding your baby, early learning, bonding, childcare support and preparing for school.

Reliable, reassuring information for every stage of your journey.

Visit **BestStartinLife.gov.uk**.



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