

Childcare is one of the biggest costs facing working families today. The Government is extending their childcare offer to make it more affordable and accessible for parents to reduce the barriers that may be preventing some parents from working.

We've put together this special edition of our newsletter to help you understand the changes and what support you might be eligible for.

We're also running some online information sessions about how to access more early years funded childcare and other financial help. The details are at the bottom of this page.

## What's changing?

At the moment, all parents in Devon are entitled to up to 15 hours a week funded childcare for children aged three and four years old. This increases to up to 30 hours a week for parents who work and earn more than the equivalent of 16 hours a week at the National Minimum or Living Wage, but less than £100,000 per year.

Some two-year-olds are also eligible for up to 15 hours a week funded childcare if their family receive some additional forms of government support.

From April, the scheme will be gradually expanded so that by September 2025, working parents of all children over the age of nine months old will be entitled to up to 30 hours a week funded childcare.

The changes are being introduced gradually.

## Key dates:

- **from April 2024**, eligible working parents of two-year-olds will be able to access up to 15 hours a week funded childcare
- **from September 2024**, up to 15 hours a week funded childcare will be extended to eligible working parents of children aged from nine months to three year olds
- **from September 2025**, eligible working parents of children under the age of five-years-old will be entitled to up to 30 hours a week funded childcare

## Will your child be two years old by Sunday 31 March 2024?

Applications are now open for eligible working parents of two year olds to receive up to 15 hours a week funded childcare, starting from April 2024.

You'll need to be working, and earning under £100,000 a year, but at least £167 a week (the equivalent of 16 hours a week at the National Minimum or Living Wage).

If you, or your partner, are on maternity, paternity or adoption leave, or you're unable to work because you are disabled or have caring responsibilities, you could still be eligible.

## How do I apply for funded childcare?

You can apply for a code to get funded childcare [on the Government's website](#). You'll need to set up a childcare account. It usually takes 20 minutes to apply. You may find out if you're eligible straight away, but it can take up to seven days.

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

The deadline for applications is Sunday 31 March 2024 to be able to access the funding from Monday 1 April 2024. If you miss the deadline, you won't be able to start using the new entitlements until the next funding period, which starts on Sunday 1 September 2024.

Make sure you have the following information to hand before starting the application process:

- your national insurance number (or unique taxpayer reference if you are self-employed)
- details of any Government support or benefits you receive
- the UK birth certificate reference number (if you have one) for your child
- the date you started or are due to start work (this can be approximate if more than three months ago)

You and your partner cannot both have accounts for the same child, but you must include your partner in your application if you are married or in a civil partnership and live together; or are not married or in a civil partnership, but living together as though you are. Their employment and income will not affect your eligibility if they are, or will be absent from your household for more than six months or are in prison.

If you are separated, you and your ex-partner need to decide who should apply if you are jointly responsible for your child. If you cannot decide, both of you must apply separately and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) will decide who gets a childcare account.

### **When can I apply for funded childcare?**

You can apply from when your child is one year and 36 weeks old for up to 15 hours a week funded childcare or two years and 36 weeks old for up to 30 hours a week funded childcare.

- If your child's birthday is between 1 September and 31 December, the best time to apply is from 15 October to 30 November in order to receive the funding on or after 1 January
- If your child's birthday is between 1 January and 31 March, the best time to apply is from 15 January to 28 February in order to receive the funding on or after 1 April
- If your child's birthday is between 1 April and 31 August, the best time to apply is from 15 June to 31 July in order to receive the funding on or after 1 September

You can apply outside of these recommended dates but you might not receive your code in time. You must have a valid code by the end of the month before a new funding period starts.

You must sign in to your childcare account to confirm your details are up to date every three months or your code will expire.

### **When can my child start?**

Your child can begin to receive the funding from the start of the funding period following their relevant birthday (see table above).

Early Years funded childcare stops when your child starts in reception class (or reaches compulsory school age, if later).

### **How can I use my free childcare?**

The hours of funded childcare per week are based on 38 weeks of the year (school term-time), however, they can be used flexibly with one or more providers and can be 'stretched' over 52 weeks by using fewer hours per week.

The childcare must be with an [approved childcare provider](#) and can be used in day care settings such as nurseries and pre-schools, at childminders, sessional providers such as play groups and after school clubs.

### Will there be enough places?

It's estimated that around an additional 5,430 children in Devon will require a funded childcare place by September 2024 as a result of the Government extending their funded childcare support.

There may be a shortage of childcare places in some areas, so please contact your local setting for more information and to discuss your requirements.

To give providers more flexibility in how they run their businesses, the Government has increased the staff-to-child ratio so now one member of staff can look after five children.

They're also increasing the hourly rate paid to childcare providers and are offering an incentive of up to £1,200 for people to become childminders.

You can find out more about the different job roles within early years, the qualifications and training available, such as the [Government's Early Years Educator Apprenticeship Scheme](#) and where the latest job vacancies are, [on our website](#).

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### What if my child has additional needs?

Children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) should be included and educated, with support where required, alongside their peers. You can find out about the range of support and opportunities in the [Devon SEND Local Offer](#).

All childcare providers must make 'reasonable adjustments' to include children with special educational needs and disabilities.

There's more information about help with paying for childcare for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities [on our website](#).

### What other financial childcare help is available?

The Government's [Childcare Choices website](#) brings together all the existing childcare offers in one place, so parents can get the help that fits their family.

This could be through Tax Free Childcare, 30 Hours Childcare, or Universal Credit Childcare. Some families might be eligible to use more than one childcare scheme together to get the most out of it.

There's also a '[Childcare Calculator](#)' to add up all the help you can get.

The 'Help For Households' website also has a [section with advice and financial support specifically for families](#).

### Want to know more?

We're running some free online information sessions in February about how to access funded childcare, what funding is available, the eligibility criteria and how to apply.

There is no need to book, just join by clicking on the links below:

- Monday 5 February, 10:30am to 11:30am – [click here to join the meeting](#)
- Wednesday 7 February, 7:30pm to 8:30pm – [click here to join the meeting](#)
- Wednesday 14 February, 4pm to 5pm – [click here to join the meeting](#)

While these sessions are primarily for parents, anyone that would like to know more about Early Years Funding is welcome to attend.