



Best Start in Life community session Q&A:

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE

Q: How do I find support, and when should I apply?

A: The Best Start in Life website has a childcare support checker where you can enter your details and see what you're eligible for.

Check what support you can get here: <https://beststartinlife.gov.uk/eligibility-checker/>

(Facilitators might choose to use this section to cover the full range of offers with parents in more detail, using the website or other available resources as reference points.)

When to apply for 30 hours for working families:

- Eligible working parents can access up to **30 hours of funded childcare per week** for children aged 9 months up to school age.
- Contact your chosen provider as early as possible to secure a place.
- You can apply for your code up to **16 weeks before your baby turns 9 months old**.
- Apply online **before the deadline** to receive a code for your childcare provider.
- The deadline is the day before the new term begins (1 January, 1 April and 1 September), but apply earlier if you can.
- We recommend applying at least **6 weeks before the deadline**.
- Some providers may ask for codes earlier, so check with your nursery, childminder etc.

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

When to apply for Early Learning for 2 year olds:

- Parents receiving additional forms of government support (e.g. income support or an education, health and care (EHC) plan) can apply for 15 funded hours of early learning once their child turns 2.
- Apply through your local authority the term before your child turns 2, they can help you find a place (terms start on 1 January, 1 April or 1 September)
- You can find out more and check if you are eligible on the Best Start in Life website: <https://beststartinlife.gov.uk/childcare-early-years-education/15-and-30-hours-support/additional-support/>

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15 hours for all families in England:

- Available for **all 3 and 4 year olds**, regardless of family circumstances (such as income or benefits).
- You can get 15 funded hours from the term after your child's 3rd birthday, starting on or after 1 January, 1 April or 1 September
- Speak to your chosen childcare provider to find out more and to see if they can offer a place.

Other support:

- **Tax-Free Childcare** for eligible working families, including the self-employed, in the UK with children aged 0-11 (or 0-16 if they have a disability).
- **Universal Credit Childcare** for eligible working families claiming Universal Credit with children under 17.
- **Holiday activities and food programme:** Free school-holiday childcare, meals, and activities – mainly for children receiving free school meals.
- **Free breakfast clubs:** 30 minute sessions before school where children get a free breakfast so they can start every day ready to learn. National roll out to every primary school will be phased.

Find out more here: <https://beststartinlife.gov.uk/childcare-early-years-education/>

Q: How does childcare and early education support my child's development?

A: High-quality childcare and early education play a vital role in your child's growth and learning. It helps them to:

- **Develop social skills:** interacting with other children and adults builds confidence and communication
- **Learn through play:** activities encourage curiosity, problem-solving and creativity
- **Build language and communication:** talking, listening and reading together supports speech and understanding
- **Prepare for school:** routines and structured learning help children adapt to the classroom environment
- **Support emotional wellbeing:** caring relationships with staff help children feel safe and secure

Early education also gives parents peace of mind and can make it easier to balance work and family life.

Find out more here: <https://beststartinlife.gov.uk/childcare-early-years-education/why-childcare-matters/>

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Q: Do you have to be working to apply or are there other offers?

A: No: you do not always have to be working. There is a range of support available, and eligibility can depend on other factors besides income, such as:

- Your child's age
- If you receive Universal Credit and/or other forms of government support
- Whether your child has a disability
- If your partner is working and you are on carer's leave or receive certain other benefits

To note: you may also be able to get support if you work irregular hours

The best way to check what support you can get is by using the Best Start in Life Childcare Support Checker: <https://beststartinlife.gov.uk/eligibility-checker/>

Q: Can I get support if I'm on parental leave?

A: Yes. If you are applying for childcare for an older child (not the one you're on parental leave for), you can apply for a **childcare code as normal to access the 30 hours working entitlement.**

You can also apply for the child who is the subject of the parental leave, but **when you return to work will affect when you can take up the childcare.**

You may be eligible for **Universal Credit Childcare** if you're receiving:

- **Statutory Maternity Pay**
- **Statutory Paternity Pay**
- **Statutory Shared Parental Pay**
- **Statutory Adoption Pay**
- **Maternity Allowance**

Find out more: <https://beststartinlife.gov.uk/childcare-early-years-education/15-and-30-hours-support/faqs/>

Q: What support can I get if my child has a disability?

A: 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.**

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Talk to your provider to find out what equipment and support might be available for your child.

The best way to check what support you can get is by using the **Best Start in Life Childcare Support Checker**: <https://beststartinlife.gov.uk/eligibility-checker/>

Conversation starters:

- “What helped you decide on childcare, or what are you still unsure about?”
- “How do you balance work and parenting, what’s worked or been hard?”
- “What questions did you ask when visiting nurseries or childminders?”
- “What signs helped you feel confident your child was in safe hands?”
- “Has anyone here found it hard to understand what support they can get?”