



Free childcare and early education for under fives

plus other information, advice and
support including for older children

Information
for Parents

Updated September 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.

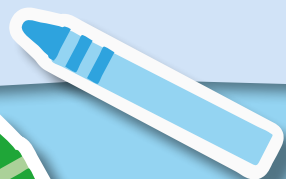
Some children of working parents will be eligible for free childcare from as young as nine months old.

In addition, you can receive some support to reduce the cost of childcare fees 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 the term **childcare** to mean all early education and childcare and the term **provider** to refer to all types of childcare or school.



What is free childcare for under fives?

Free childcare refers to the 15 or 30 hours per week that families may be eligible for through the routes we will explain. This can be from as young as 9 months for working parents until they are five years old and in school. The government funds these hours over 38 weeks of the year in the same way they fund school places (and we call this term time). If you want hours over more than 38 weeks, please discuss this with your provider, as several providers in Newcastle offer these hours stretched.

While we use the term free, we recognise that there may be optional extras that parents choose whether to pay for, such as extra hours, meals or activities. However, no parent should be charged a **“top-up”** charge if they just want to access their free hours. But remember settings may have set session lengths. If this length is 5 hours for each child, they may not be able to offer you 4 hours, but you must always have the option of paying no extra charges. Some providers will have waiting lists for places.



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 by
1 January – 31 March	Start of Summer term (after Easter holidays)	31 March
1 April – 31 August	Start of Autumn term (September)	31 August
1 September – 31 December	Start of Spring term (January)	31 December

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

Child born between	Turns nine months between	Eligible Term	Apply by
1st April – 30th June	1st January – 31st March	Summer (After Easter)	31 March
1st July – 30th November	1st April – 31st August	Autumn (September)	31 August
1st December – 31st March	1st September – 31st December	Spring (January)	31 December

*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 (including some independent schools)
- Some out of school clubs



For a full list visit **www.newcastlechildcare.org.uk** or scan the QR code



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, you will still need to check if you are eligible with your local provider.

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 the last one, two or 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 – regardless of earnings status or family circumstances.

To apply visit the childcare provider you wish to use.
No code needed.



Free childcare for working parents with children aged 9 months to reception age

In 2024 the entitlement for working parents expanded.

The following is now available:

- Children of eligible working parents aged 9 months up to reception age – (a maximum) 30 hours free childcare per week, for 38 weeks a year

Families receive an **11 digit childcare code** if eligible for this funding*

*for three-and-four-year-olds the 30 hours funding is 15 hours working parents entitlement + 15 universal, but for twos and under there is no universal entitlement so the code gives them the maximum 30 hours.

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) who 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 starting a new job)

**minimum wages rates vary for different age groups and change every April.
www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates (April 2025 minimum wage for 21 and over is £12.21 per hour, £195.36 per week or £10,158.72 per year)



How do you apply for free childcare?

- You need to apply through the online childcare service at **www.beststartinlife.gov.uk/eligibility-checker** or call **0300 123 4097**
- 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 a working families' childcare 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 (childcare code) every 3 months via the Government Gateway.
- If you cannot access the internet, you can ring the Childcare Service on **0300 123 4097**.

How can you use your free childcare?

You can use childcare at times that suit you. Some providers are more flexible, for instance a childminder, who might offer weekends or after 6pm. 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

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.

Reconfirmation of working families' childcare code

Childcare Codes need to be reconfirmed every three months. Remember to log in to your childcare account on GOV.UK to check when your reconfirmation dates are, so that you can renew your code on time. You will also receive reminders from HMRC when it is due.

If you are unable to renew your code by your reconfirmation deadline, you may be able to retain your child's childcare place for a short period; this is known as a grace period. Your provider will be able to tell you if you are in a grace period.

How often do I need to log into my childcare account?

Every 3 months to reconfirm that your details are up to date and that you remain eligible for the childcare entitlements for working parents and/or Tax-Free Childcare.

Will I be reminded to reconfirm my details?

Yes, you **should** receive a reminder:

- the first email reminder is sent 4 weeks before reconfirmation is due
- a further reminder is sent 2 weeks before reconfirmation is due
- a notification is sent on the deadline date of reconfirmation to notify you that your eligibility for funded childcare for working parents has stopped and asking you to confirm your details as soon as possible

This message will come from GOV.UK. Please make sure that your details are up to date. If you have not received a reminder, please check your junk mail folder.

How long does reconfirmation usually take?

In most cases, reconfirmation should only take a few minutes, but it may take longer if you need to provide further information.

How do I log into my childcare account to reconfirm?

You need to log into your childcare account on GOV.UK using your Government Gateway ID to reconfirm. The dates between which you should reconfirm will be displayed when you log in.

Eligible example

You and your partner both work (both earning less than £100,000).

You work 38 hours per week and your partner works 13 hours per week at £16 an hour, therefore earning £208.00 per week. This is more than the £195.36 threshold* and you are therefore eligible for the free childcare provision.

*This threshold is based on national minimum wage of £12.21 for over 21s, correct as of April 2025.

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.

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 children 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. For each child in receipt of DLA the providers get £938* per year (*this amount is correct for 2025)

Will you have to pay anything?

Your child's free childcare hours (up to 30 hours over 38 weeks) 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 be charged in advance for your free hours.

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

- Choosing to buy extra hours above your entitlement
- Food – such as lunch but there should be an alternative option, for instance all schools allow children to bring a packed lunch
- Consumables (non-food)- such as nappies, wipes, sunscreen but there should be an option instead to bring your own.
- Extra activities – for instance music or language lessons

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 two-year-old entitlement for families receiving some additional forms of government support (15 hours), once eligible, you remain eligible.

For the working entitlements only, you are required to log in to your Government Gateway account 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. (See section earlier on)

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 your “free childcare offer”?

Please visit **www.newcastlechildcare.org.uk** or you can discuss with the Early Years team, details on the back page.

If you have a complaint, you should take this up with your provider first. If you are unhappy with the response, contact our team or **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 their local council.

Other support for childcare costs

As well as 15 or 30 hours free childcare parents can get other 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 **www.beststartinlife.gov.uk** or ring **0300 123 4097**

Starting or changing childcare provider mid-term:

Notice period for funding hours*

*Providers may have different notice periods for any paid for 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 with a new provider during this period.

Mid-term starts

Children eligible for universal entitlement (15 hours for three-and-four-year-olds) or two-year-olds (15 hours entitlement for families receiving some additional forms of support) 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.

Holiday childcare for school aged children

There is also a wide range of holiday childcare in Newcastle. This may be delivered by your school, wraparound provision or childminder. For more information

<https://childrenandfamiliesnewcastle.org.uk/>

Newcastle's Best Holiday Ever programme

Newcastle's Best Holiday Ever is a programme funded by the Department for Education for children aged 5-16 who are in need or eligible for benefits-related free school meals. See website for details: www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/schools-learning-and-childcare/help-school-and-learning-costs/apply-free-school-meals

It is designed for families in Newcastle during the Easter, Summer and Christmas school holidays to help children, young people and their parents have fulfilling, active, fun-filled and healthy experiences. Different events take place in different parts of the city. Each area of the city has its own timetable. For more information on HAF and things to do across Newcastle see website for details. www.childrenandfamiliesnewcastle.org.uk/school-age-children-and-young-people/things-do



Wraparound childcare

As part of a government initiative, wraparound childcare for primary school children across Newcastle is expanding.

What is wraparound childcare?

Wraparound childcare is before and after school care that wraps around the school day. This is for primary school-aged children (Reception to year 6).

Wraparound childcare providers:

- offer regular, reliable, high-quality play opportunities for school-aged children, typically from 8am in the morning and until 6pm in the afternoon but this may vary to meet local needs
- typically operate for primary school-aged children (Reception to year 6) but may also provide care for nursery class children
- sometimes also provide holiday care
- can operate on or off school site
- include Ofsted registered childminders

Wraparound childcare is different from out-of-school activities, or school clubs, which are less frequent and can be a one-off activity.

How much will it cost and is financial support available?

Providers will set their own fees for wraparound places, so prices will vary. Parents and carers will pay their wraparound childcare provider directly for their child's place.

If you are eligible, you will be able to use: **www.beststartinlife.gov.uk/childcare-early-years-education/tax-free-childcare** or **www.beststartinlife.gov.uk/childcare-early-years-education/universal-credit-childcare** to help pay for your place. You might also be able to get help with your initial upfront childcare costs. Check what support is available to you by visiting **www.beststartinlife.gov.uk**

Who is eligible for wraparound childcare?

All parents with primary school-aged children are eligible to access wraparound childcare.

Will this affect the free breakfast club at my child's school?

No, this will not replace an existing free breakfast club, although an earlier start may be available for a fee.

How do I find wraparound childcare near me?

Parents looking for childcare options for their school-aged child should speak to their child's school. If wraparound care is unavailable, please contact the wraparound team at **wraparound@newcastle.gov.uk**

Parents should see an increase in the number of wraparound childcare places available across the city from September 2025.



More information from:

Early Years Sector Support, Newcastle City Council

EarlyYears@newcastle.gov.uk
0191 277 4674

The Childcare Service

- Understand what you may get
www.gov.uk/childcare-calculator
- Understand when and how to apply
www.gov.uk/free-childcare-if-working

0300 123 4097

Best Start in Life

www.beststartinlife.gov.uk

Finding Childcare in Newcastle

www.newcastlechildcare.org.uk

Children and Families

If you would like to know about other support available visit:
www.childrenandfamiliesnewcastle.org.uk

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

