



30 Hours Free Childcare for Working Parents of 3 and 4 year-olds

Frequently Asked Questions - A Guide for Parents in Norfolk

From 1 September 2017, the Government will be extending the free childcare entitlement for working parents of 3 and 4 year-olds, to 30 hours per week for 38 weeks of the year. This is being introduced alongside a new scheme to help working families with the cost of childcare called **Tax-Free Childcare**.

1. How many hours are free?

The current **universal entitlement** for **all** 3 and 4 year-olds will continue. Every 3 and 4 year-old will still be entitled to 15 hours free childcare per week for 38 weeks of the year – a total of 570 hours per year.

However, the Government is going to increase this entitlement for eligible working parents of 3 and 4 year-olds from 1 September 2017. Working parents will be entitled to an additional 15 hours of free childcare a week to make a total of 30 hours. This will be offered for 38 weeks of the year – a total of 1,140 hours per year.

2. Will my child qualify?

In order to qualify, both parents must be working or the sole parent must be working in a lone parent family. There are some exceptions though. See '**Are there any exceptions to the eligibility criteria**' below.

3. Can I claim the 30 free hours for my foster child?

No. Foster carers cannot claim the 30 free hours for children they foster.

4. Can I claim the 30 free hours for my adopted child?

Yes, as long as you and your partner meet the eligibility criteria.

5. Are there any exceptions to the eligibility criteria?

Yes, there are some exceptions to the criteria that both parents must be working, or the sole parent must be working in a lone parent family.

You could still qualify for the 30 hours free childcare if:

- one or both parents are temporarily away from work because of maternity, paternity, parental or adoption leave
- one or both parents are in receipt of statutory sick pay
- one or both parents are on specific carers' benefits
- one or both parents are on specific disability benefits.

6. Will my child qualify if I am living with a new partner or have remarried?

If you have remarried or are living with a new partner, you and your new partner **must both be working** in order for your child to be eligible.

7. Is there a minimum or a maximum amount that each parent must earn?

Eligibility is based on income earned, not hours worked.

- Each parent over the age of 25 must earn **at least** £115.20 a week at current rates (as of November 2016). This is the equivalent of 16 hours at the National Living Wage
- If you are age 16 - 24 you must earn **at least** £64.00 - £111.20 at current rates (as of November 2016) - depending on your age. This is the equivalent of 16 hours at the National Minimum Wage for your age.
- If you are on an apprenticeship you must earn **at least** £54.40 a week at current rates (as of November 2016). This applies for apprentice parents under the age of 19, or older apprentice parents *in the first year of an apprenticeship*. This is the equivalent of 16 hours at the national Apprentice Rate.

The **upper limit** that **each parent** can earn is £100,000.

8. Will my child qualify if my partner or I are on a zero hours' contract?

Providing you work on average two weeks out of every three and when you are working you earn the equivalent of **at least** 25 hours at the National Living Wage or National Minimum Wage (depending on your age), your child will be eligible for the 30 hours free childcare.

9. Will my child qualify if my partner or I are self-employed?

As long as you earn **at least** the minimum amount (see '**Is there a minimum or a maximum amount that each parent must earn?**' above) but less than the upper threshold of £100,000 each, your child will be eligible for the 30 hours free childcare.

10. Will my child qualify if I've just started a new job?

If you expect to earn **at least** the minimum amount (see '**Is there a minimum or a maximum amount that each parent must earn?**' above) on average, over the next three months, your child will be eligible for the 30 hours free childcare.

11. What happens if my income drops below the minimum amount? Or I lose my job?

If either parent starts earning less than the minimum income threshold or stops working altogether, you will be given a short 'grace period' (set by the Government) to give you time to find a new job and start earning at least the minimum amount again. This 'grace period' has not been specified as of November 2016.

If you do not find a new job within the grace period, your child will stop being eligible to receive the 30 hours free childcare.

12. If my partner and I become eligible part way through a term, can we get the 30 free hours straight-away?

The Government has said that local authorities should allow you to start claiming your 30 free hours “as soon as is reasonably practicable” during that term, and no later than the start of the next term.

13. Will my child be eligible from their 3rd birthday?

Your child will be eligible to claim the 30 free hours from the beginning of the term **after** their 3rd birthday. Terms starts on 1st January, 1st April or 1st September.

For example, if you child turns 3 on the 23rd June, they will be eligible from the 1st September.

In order for your child to qualify for the 30 free hours from 1st September 2017, they must have been born after 1st September 2013.

14. How long can my child receive the 30 free hours for?

Your child can receive the 30 free hours until they reach statutory school age **or** attend school in Reception class (Year R).

15. How do I apply for the 30 free hours?

Parents must apply through an online eligibility checking system. This is being developed by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and should be available in Spring 2017.

Parents who provide false information about their eligibility can be fined between £300 and £3000.

16. Who makes the decision whether my partner and I are eligible?

Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customers (HMRC). Once you have gone through the online eligibility checking system, HMRC will give you an Eligibility Reference Number. You will need to give this to your chosen childcare provider in order to claim the 30 free hours.

17. What types of childcare provider can offer the 30 free hours?

All Ofsted-registered approved childcare providers in Norfolk can offer the 30 hours free childcare. This includes childminders, nursery schools, day nurseries and pre-schools. Ofsted-registered childcare providers in Norfolk are listed on the online **Norfolk Directory** www.norfolk.gov.uk/directory

18. Can I claim the 30 hours free childcare to pay a private nanny or a relative to provide childcare?

No, because as they are not approved to deliver the entitlement.

19. Will all childcare providers in Norfolk offer the 30 free hours?

It is unlikely. It will be **optional** for approved childcare providers in Norfolk to offer the 30 free hours.

Norfolk Family Information Service (FIS) is currently speaking to all childcare providers to see if they are **likely** to be offering the 30 free hours and are recording their responses on the online **Norfolk Directory**. You can check who is **likely** to offer it here

<http://search3.openobjects.com/kb5/ncc/directory/results.page?fundedplaces=3&directorychannel=1>

Please note that childcare providers who opt **not** to provide the 30 free hours might still offer the universal 15 free hours for 3 & 4-year-olds.

20. My current childcare provider doesn't look like they will offer the 30 free hours. What can I do?

You have a couple of options.

You could move your child to another childcare provider who will offer the 30 free hours. Or you could stay with your existing provider if they will offer the universal 15 free hours but also use **another** childcare provider who **is** going to offer the 30 free hours, for the additional 15 hours per week.

21. Can I use more than one childcare provider to claim the 30 free hours?

Yes. You can use up to 3 childcare providers - **but you cannot claim more than 30 hours per week in total**.

Also, you cannot use more than 2 childcare providers on one day to claim the 30 free hours.

22. Do I have to use all 30 free hours each week?

No, you can use anything from 16-30 hours - it is up to you.

However, not all childcare providers may be able to offer the exact amount of free hours that you require. Providers can claim the 30 free hours' entitlement from their Local Authority using the following criteria (as of November 2016):

- 10 hours maximum per day
- No minimum amount of hours per day
- Hours between 6am – 8pm each day

If your childcare provider cannot offer the exact amount of free hours that you require, you could split your 30 free hours across more than one childcare provider.

23. Can I claim my free hours all year round?

The new 30 free hours' entitlement should be flexible. The phrase '30 free hours a week' is based on a childcare provider only being open for the 38 weeks during the year (term-time only). However childcare providers **will have the option** to offer the same total number of hours (1,140 per year) over more than 38 weeks.

For example, if a childcare provider is open 48 weeks of the year, then they could offer 23.75 funded hours per week all year round. Or if a provider is open 51 weeks of the year, then they could offer 22.25 funded hours per week all year round. This is known as a stretched offer.

However, not all childcare providers may be able to offer the stretched offer.

Providers can claim the 30 free hours' entitlement from their Local Authority using the following criteria (as of November 2016):

- 10 hours maximum per day
- No minimum amount of hours per day
- Hours between 6am – 8pm each day

No childcare provider can offer *more* than 30 free hours per week over *less* than 38 weeks.

If your child attends a childcare provider for more than the free hours available in a claim period, **you will be responsible for these fees**. You should also check whether there are any other additional charges such as for meals and snacks.

30 Hours Free Childcare Legislation and Eligibility

From 1 September 2017, the Government will increase free childcare to 30 hours a week (for up to 38 weeks a year) for 3 and 4 year-olds. This is part of the Childcare Act 2016

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/5/enacted>. However, this increase will only be available to families who meet certain criteria. To find out who is eligible, see the Department for Education's (DfE) Childcare Bill

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/482517/Childcare_Bill_Policy_Statement_12.03.2015.pdf

Several local authorities, the 'early implementers' are piloting the 30 hours offer from September 2016. Norfolk County Council **is not** one of these councils. See the GOV.UK website for more details on 30 hours free childcare <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-of-parents-benefit-from-30-hours-free-childcare-early>

Please note, this information is correct at the time of going to print in November 2016, but could be subject to change or updated.

If you have any further questions about 30 Hours Free Childcare or Tax-Free Childcare please contact **Norfolk Family Information Service** www.norfolk.gov.uk/fis on 0344 800 8020 or email fis@norfolk.gov.uk. You can also receive updates on 30 Hours Free Childcare and Tax-Free Childcare by following FIS on social media: **Facebook** www.facebook.com/NorfolkFIS, **Twitter** www.twitter.com/FISnorfolk and Instagram @norfolkfamilyinfo