

Benefits for families & Children

What you need to know about benefits for families and children

When it was first introduced in 1977, Child Benefit was a tax-free, non-means-tested benefit, available to families with children (or those responsible for children), regardless of their household income. Back then, it replaced the old Family Allowance that was designed to encourage families to boost the population after the Second World War by having more children. These days, Child Benefit remains available to most people with children, and is valued by millions of families across the UK – especially those living on low incomes.

But it's not the only source of extra money, as there are several other benefits available for families to help with the cost of bringing up children.

Did you know?

The most recent figures show there are 7.55 million families, responsible for 13.11 million children and qualifying young people, receiving Child Benefit in the UK (*Source: HMRC*)

Child Benefit: an overview

Child Benefit is paid to individuals with a child under the age of 16 or a young person under the age of 20 who are in approved full-time education or training. In England, it's also available to young people who are on a 16-19 study programme.

Child Benefit is available for each child you're responsible for, including those who you're looking after but aren't your biological children (see also *Guardian's Allowance*, below). You can claim it if you're adopting a child, but it's only usually available to foster parents if your local council isn't paying anything towards your foster child's keep.

However, as soon as your child starts working for a living – including if they start an apprenticeship in England – or is no longer in full-time education or training, or if they start claiming their own benefits such as Income Support or Employment and Support Allowance, your Child Benefit will stop.

Child Benefit is still a tax-free payment for many families, but the tax-free entitlement changed in 2013. Now, if you or your partner's individual income is more than £50,000 a year and you're getting Child Benefit, you may have to pay extra tax. But if your combined income is more than £50,000 – and neither you or your partner earns more than £50,000 individually – you won't be

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taxed on it, even if either of you earns just under £50,000 a year.

How much is it?

Since April 2015, the rate of Child Benefit is paid at £20.70 a week for your oldest child, then £13.70 for each younger child. Payments are made directly into your bank account each week.

To claim Child Benefit, all you have to do is [download and complete form CH2](#) and send it to the Child Benefit Office. It can take up to 12 weeks to process a new claim, so it's a good idea to apply as soon as your child is born or a child comes to live with you. It can, however, be backdated for up to three months if you don't apply straight away.

Child Tax Credit

People who are on a low income and are also responsible for at least one child under the age of 16 (or 20, if they're in approved education or training) may currently claim Child Tax Credit for each qualifying child.

As from April 6th 2017, you can only claim for a child born on or after that date if they're the first or second child you're claiming for. Exceptions to the two-child limit include:

- **Multiple births** If you're already claiming Child Tax Credit for two or more children and you had twins or triplets after April 6th 2017, you can claim for one of the twins or two of the triplets.

- **Your child has a child** If one of the children you're claiming Child Tax Credit for had a child of their own on or after April 6th 2017, you can claim for their child until your child makes their own Child Tax Credit claim or until they leave your household. You won't be able to claim for them if your child leaves home but their child remains in your care.

- **Adoption** You can claim for a child you adopted on or after April 6th 2017 if you already receive Child Tax Credit for two or more children.

Meanwhile, if you were already claiming for more than two children born before April 6th 2017, your Child Tax Credit remains unaffected.

You don't have to be working to claim Child Tax Credit, and any money you get won't affect your Child Benefit.

You can only make a claim for Child Tax Credit if you're not already claiming Universal Credit or if you don't live in an area where Universal Credit has replaced Child Tax Credits (eventually Universal Credit will replace Child Tax Credit in all areas of the UK).

The amount you'll get depends on your circumstances, including how much you earn and how many children you're claiming for. If your child is disabled and receives Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment, or if they're certified blind, you may get extra money.

Like many other benefits, working out what you're entitled to with Child Tax Credit can be complicated. To get an idea of how much you could be getting, use this [tax credits calculator](#) or

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take a look at these [tax credits entitlement tables](#). If you want to apply for Child Tax Credit, call the Tax Credit Helpline on 0345 300 3900.

Meanwhile, if you're working and on a low income, you may also be entitled to Working Tax Credit, which includes some help towards childcare. For more information, see our guide [What you need to know about Working Tax Credit](#).

Maternity and paternity benefits

If you're a woman having a baby – or the partner of a woman having a baby – there are benefits you may be eligible for, including Statutory Maternity Pay, Maternity Allowance and Statutory Paternity Pay.

Statutory Maternity Pay

This is available to women who have been working for the same employer for at least 26 weeks by the time they are 15 weeks from the date their baby is due, and who earn on average at least £113 a week. It's paid for up to 39 weeks: for the first six weeks you'll get 90 per cent of your average weekly pay (before tax), then for the next 33 weeks you'll receive a set amount (currently this is £140.98) or 90 percent of your average weekly earning, whichever is lower.

Maternity Allowance

If you don't qualify for Statutory Maternity Pay, you may be able to get Maternity Allowance if you're working (if you're self-employed, you must pay Class 2 National Insurance including voluntary National Insurance to be eligible) or if you've recently stopped working. Like Statutory

Maternity Pay, it's paid for up to 39 weeks. However, if you don't work, you may also get Maternity Allowance depending on your circumstances. The amount you'll get depends on your eligibility (currently, this is £140.98 a week or 90 per cent of your average weekly earnings – whichever is lower – or £27 a week).

Statutory Paternity Pay

Fathers-to-be may also be able to get Statutory Paternity Pay for up to two weeks during their paternity leave. The rate of Statutory Paternity Pay is currently £140.98 or 90 per cent of your average weekly earnings, whichever is lower.

Statutory Adoption Pay

If you're taking time off work to adopt a child who has been matched with you for adoption by an adoption agency – or if you've had a child placed with you for adoption – you may be able to get Statutory Adoption Pay. This is paid for up to 39 weeks, and you'll get 90 percent of your average gross weekly earning for the first six weeks, then the same flat rate as Statutory Maternity and Paternity Pay.

Maternity grants

Families on a low income that are receiving benefits or tax credits may be eligible for a maternity grant from the Social Fund, also called a Sure Start maternity grant. This is designed to help you meet the cost of having a new baby, but you're only eligible if your baby is the only child under 16 in your household or if you already have children but you're pregnant with twins or more babies. The current grant is a one-off payment of £500, which you don't have to pay back.

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Healthy Start vouchers

If you're pregnant or have a child under the age of four and you're getting Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, you may qualify for the Healthy Start scheme. This aims to help families buy basic foods such as milk, fruit, vegetables and infant formula, and consists of vouchers that can be used in a large number of shops around the country. The scheme also includes free vitamin supplements.

Working Tax Credit

Women who already get Working Tax Credit and who take time off work to have a baby are entitled to keep getting their Working Tax Credit for the first 39 weeks of maternity or adoption leave. Men receiving Working Tax Credit can also keep getting it while they're on ordinary paternity leave.

Guardian's Allowance

Anyone who's bringing up a child whose parent or parents have died may qualify for Guardian's Allowance, even if there's one surviving parent, depending on the circumstances (such as if the person claiming doesn't know where the surviving parent is or if the child's parents were divorced and the surviving parent didn't have custody of the child).

To get this tax-free benefit, you must also qualify for Child Benefit, and one of the child's parents must have been born in the UK or lived in the UK since they were 16 for at least 52 weeks in any two-year period.

Currently, Guardian's Allowance is paid at a rate of £16.70 a week per child, and doesn't affect any other benefits you may be claiming, such as tax credits, Income Support, income-related Employment and Support Allowance or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance.

Disability Living Allowance

If your child or a child you're responsible for is disabled and is under 16 years of age, you may be able to claim Disability Living Allowance for them. The amount you'll get depends on the level of help your child needs (they may have to have an assessment to work this out). Currently, the rate of Disability Living Allowance for children is between £22 and £114.10 a week.

Find out more by calling the Disability Living Allowance helpline on 0345 712 3456.

Help with school costs

Families on a low income may also be able to get help with school costs, including free school meals and help with the costs of buying school uniforms.

For more information, see our guide [*How to get the best out of your child's education: Help with school costs.*](#)

Useful links

If you are experiencing any of the issues covered in this guide, in the first instance call our free helpline on 0808 801 0550. Our Advisors will listen without judging and will work with you as best they can to achieve a positive outcome. If

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you prefer you can email: helpline@ltcharity.org.uk. Visit our website: www.licensedtradecharity.org.uk. It's full of useful information about the kind of issues we know people who work in the licensed trade face.

provide you with an overview of the issue in question. If you're experiencing problems with this issue, our Advisors are available to you.

Other sources of information:

Citizens Advice

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

For free practical advice on a wide range of issues, including benefits such as benefits for families.

Gov.uk

www.gov.uk/browse/benefits/families

There's also lots more information on benefits for families and children on this government website.

Turn2us

www.turn2us.org.uk/

Turn2us is a charity providing help with all types of benefits and grants, including benefits for families.

The Money Advice Service

www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk

For advice about money issues, such as help with benefits, including benefits for families.

Entitledto

www.entitledto.co.uk/

Includes a benefits calculator to help you discover what benefits you may be entitled to.

NOTE: This guide is not exhaustive. It has been produced by the Licensed Trade Charity to