

Childcare Choices

Communications toolkit
for local authorities



HM Government

childcarechoices.gov.uk

Childcare Choices – supporting families with childcare costs

About these materials

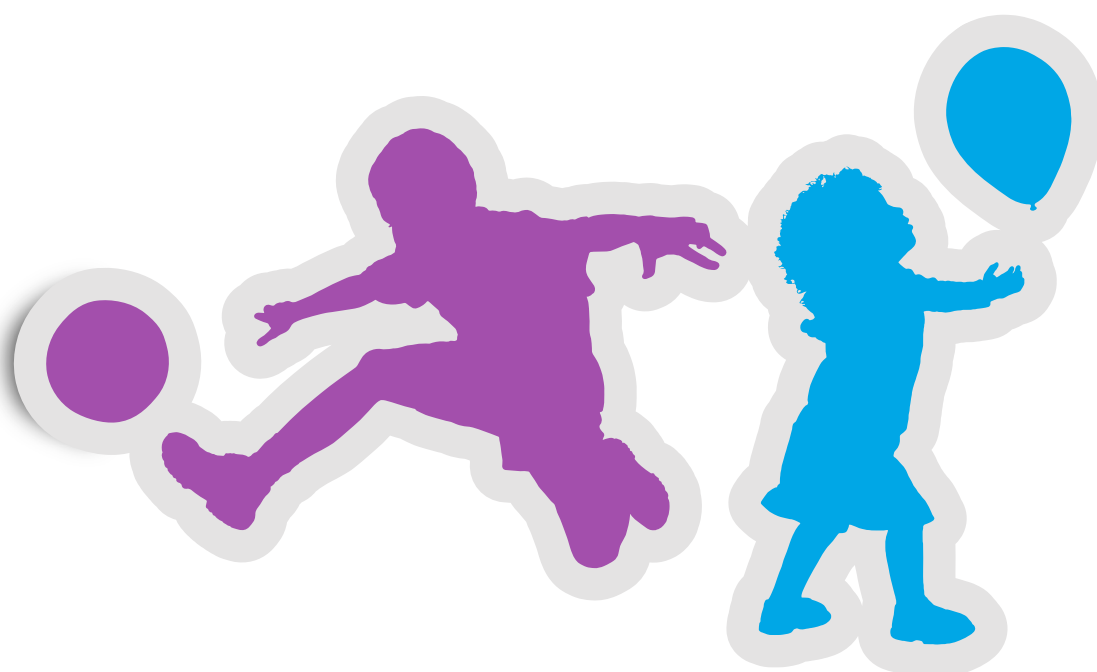
In 2017, the government introduced two new schemes to support working parents: **30 hours free childcare** for 3 and 4 year olds and **Tax-Free Childcare**.

We've produced this pack of materials to help you communicate with parents and providers in your local area about the new government childcare offers. In this pack you'll find a range of materials including:

1. Draft content for you (or providers) to share with parents
2. FAQs for parents and providers
3. Draft emails for you to share with parents or providers
4. A glossary for parents and providers to help explain key words associated with 30 hours and Tax-Free Childcare
5. Customer journeys for both 30 hours and Tax-Free Childcare
6. A factsheet for parents on how they can use their 30 hours entitlements

The aim of the toolkit is to enable you and providers to help parents understand what childcare support is available to them and to emphasise the importance of applying in good time, in order to secure a 30 hours childcare place for the next term. These materials are also aimed at informing parents who already have a 30 hours code, that they need to check their details are up to date through their childcare account every 3 months to retain their place.

The toolkit also provides information on Tax-Free Childcare which helps local families – including, the self-employed – with their childcare costs.



How to use the communications toolkit

You may wish to use some of the materials in this pack on your website, or in your direct communications to parents or providers. You may also like to share information about the new schemes with your colleagues, perhaps on your intranet or via email.

We also encourage you to promote the Childcare Choices website, including the Childcare Calculator, which helps parents find out which schemes are available to them and choose what works best for their family. Alongside this, parents can register for updates via the 'Keep Me Updated' button so they know when they become eligible to apply.

If you do not have capacity within your Early Years team or Family Information Service to disseminate this information, please pass this toolkit to your central communications team.

Note for you as an employer: As a large local employer yourself, you might also want to share some of this pack with your own staff, to help them make the most of the new childcare support. For example, if you currently offer childcare vouchers (also known as Employer-Supported Childcare) that scheme will close to new applicants in April 2018. After this date parents already claiming childcare vouchers can continue to use the scheme as long as you as their employer continue to offer it.

What are the new offers?

You can find out more about the full government childcare offer on childcarechoices.gov.uk, with a summary below. You can use the Childcare Calculator, and apply for Tax-Free Childcare and/or 30 hours free childcare through the Childcare Choices website.

Tax-Free Childcare

Up to £2,000 per child, per year for children under the age of 12 and £4,000 for disabled children under 17.

- For working families, including the self-employed, across the UK
- With children aged under 12 (or under 17 for disabled children)
- For every £8 paid in, the government will add an extra £2, up to £2,000 per child per year toward childcare costs. This means you can get up to £500 every three months per child.

A parent, and their partner, will need to expect to earn (on average) the equivalent of working 16 hours a week at their National Minimum wage (£120 at the National Living Wage, less for people on the National Minimum Wage). And earn less than £100,000 a year each. If they are on maternity, paternity or adoption leave for another child, or unable to work because they are disabled or have caring responsibilities, they could still be eligible.

Tax-Free Childcare can be used with the 15 hours and 30 hours schemes. It can't be used at the same time as childcare vouchers, Universal Credit or tax credits. The Childcare Calculator is a great tool to help families make an informed decision on which offer to use.

Registered childcare providers have a pivotal role in Tax-Free Childcare as they need to be signed up so that parents can pay them through their childcare account. All providers should have received an invitation containing the information they need to sign up, and tens of thousands have already done so. Childcare providers can find out more and sign up here childcarechoices.gov.uk/providers

30 hours free childcare

30 hours free childcare for working parents of three and four year olds

- For working families in England
- With 3 and 4-year-old children
- 30 hours for 38 weeks of the year but the hours can be stretched across the year.

30 hours free childcare is available for 3 and 4 year olds of working parents in England. The 30 hours offer doubles the existing 15 hours currently available to all 3 and 4 year olds and could save working families up to £5,000 a year.

Parents in England can apply for 30 hours childcare at the same time as Tax-Free Childcare, via the childcare service. To qualify, a parent, and their partner, will need to expect to earn (on average) the equivalent of working 16 hours a week at their National Minimum wage (£120 at the National Living Wage, less for people on the National Minimum Wage). And earn less than £100,000 a year each. If they are on maternity, paternity or adoption leave for another child, or unable to work because they are disabled or have caring responsibilities, they could still be eligible.

Childcare providers do not need to sign up online in the same way as they do for Tax-Free Childcare. If you would like to offer 30 hours speak to the early years lead at your local authority and check the resources on childcareworks.co.uk for advice and guidance.

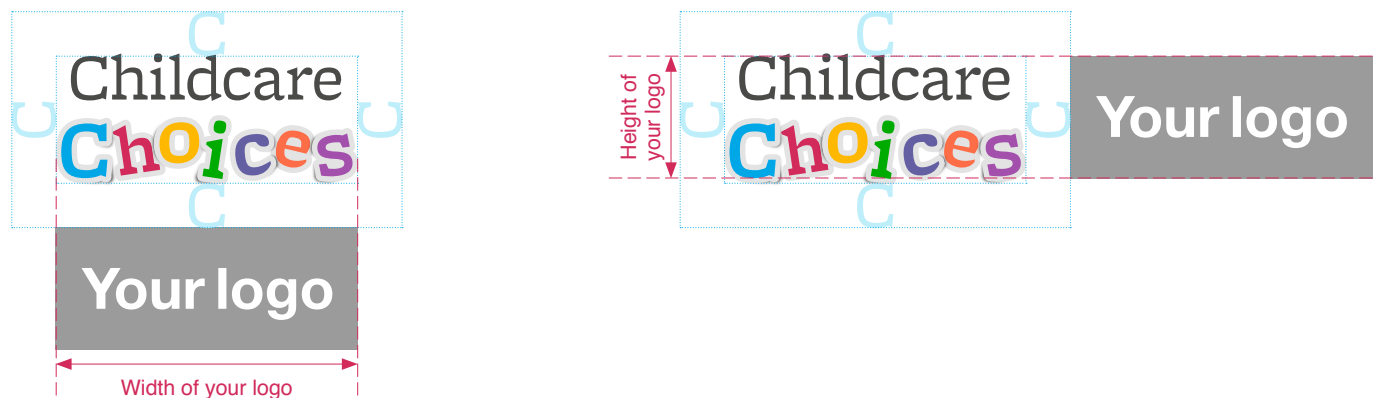


Using the logo

You are welcome to use the Childcare Choices logo in your own communications materials. This should be used in conjunction with your own authority's logo.

When using the Childcare Choices logo, please bear in mind the following guidelines:

- The logo should be a minimum of 35mm on all materials
- Ensure that there's a clear space around the Childcare Choices logo – use the height of the 'C' as a guide. Make sure this space is clear of all other graphics, for example other logos and images
- If you're placing the Childcare Choices logo alongside other logos (for example your own), bear in mind the exclusion zone and ensure all logos are a similar height and width.



What not to do



Never place partner logos too close

Never place other graphic elements within the logo exclusion zone

Never show the 'choices' sticker treatment alone



Never modify the logotype in any way, only use the master artwork files provided

Never modify the colour of the logo in any way, only use the master artwork files provided

Do not stretch or squash the logo

Childcare Choices

Top things parents need to know about the new offers: Tax-Free Childcare and 30 hours free childcare



HM Government

What is Tax-Free Childcare?

Tax-Free Childcare is a government scheme to support working parents with childcare costs.

If eligible, you set up an online childcare account which you can use to pay your childcare provider directly. For every £8 you pay in, the government will pay in an extra £2.

You can get up to £2,000 per child per year, or £4,000 for disabled children.

You can use Tax-Free Childcare to pay for:

- Registered childminders, nurseries and nannies
- Registered after-school clubs and play schemes
- Registered schools
- Home care workers working for a registered home care agency.

What is 30 hours free childcare?

Working parents of 3 and 4 year olds in England may be entitled to up to 30 hours of free childcare, for 38 weeks of the year (or fewer hours over more weeks). This is an additional 15 hours of free childcare on top of the 15 hours universal entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds in England.

When will Tax-Free Childcare be available?

The online service launched in April 2017 and is being rolled out gradually, based on the age of a family's youngest child. You can find out which age groups the service is currently available to, on [Childcare Choices](#). You can also sign-up to receive an email alert to notify you when your youngest child becomes eligible for Tax-Free Childcare.

You can apply for all your children at the same time, as soon as your youngest child is eligible.

When will 30 hours free childcare be available?

If you're eligible, you can apply now for 30 hours free childcare via [Childcare Choices](#).

Am I eligible for Tax-Free Childcare/30 hours free childcare?

You will be eligible for Tax-Free Childcare and 30 hours free childcare if:

- Your child is under 12 years old, or your child is disabled and under 17 years old for Tax-Free Childcare.
- You may be able to claim 30 hours if your child is 3 or 4 and not taking up a state funded reception place. (30 hours is available in England only.)
- The child you're applying for usually lives with you – you don't have to be their parent.
- You live and work in the UK, unless you're a Crown servant or member of the HM Armed Forces posted overseas.
- You, and any partner, are working, and each earning at least the [National Minimum Wage or Living Wage](#) for 16 hours a week – this is £120 if you're over 25 – but less than £100,000 a year each.
- If you're under 25 or an apprentice, you should expect to earn the equivalent of 16 hours, at the National Minimum Wage or Living Wage which applies to you.

You can still apply for Tax-Free childcare and 30 hours free childcare if you're:

- On paid sick leave.
- On paid ordinary or additional maternity, paternity or adoption leave, or getting Maternity Allowance, for another child.
- On paid shared parental leave.
- On paid annual leave.

You can also apply for Tax-Free Childcare and 30 hours free childcare if you're not working but expect to start a new job in the next 14 days.

You can't get Tax-Free Childcare and tax credits, Universal Credit or childcare vouchers at the same time. However, you can apply for 30 hours only, and still receive tax credits, Universal Credit or childcare vouchers.

The full eligibility criteria for 30 hours can be found on [GOV.uk](#)

Is there a difference between the existing 15 hours universal entitlement and the additional 15 hours?

Yes. 30 hours is for working parents and you need to apply through the childcare service.

However, both the 15 hours and 30 hours must follow the same regulatory framework and there should be no difference between the standard of childcare provision.

I'm on childcare vouchers. How do I switch to Tax-Free Childcare?

First, you can find out which scheme best suits you by completing the Childcare Calculator on [Childcare Choices](#).

If you wish to switch from childcare vouchers to Tax-Free Childcare, you need to notify your employer, and send HMRC confirmation that you've stopped your vouchers within three months of successfully applying for Tax-Free Childcare. The email you send your employer telling them you wish to stop using childcare vouchers can be used as confirmation.

Applying

When can I apply for 30 hours free childcare?

You can apply for 30 hours up to 16 weeks before your child turns three. We recommend that you apply as soon as you are able to – don't leave it to the last minute. To ensure you get a code for the term after your child turns three, you must have applied by the end of the previous term.

How do I apply for Tax-Free Childcare/30 hours free childcare?

You can apply for Tax-Free Childcare and 30 hours via [Childcare Choices](#).

You, and your partner if you have one, will need your:

- National Insurance number(s)
- Details of one or more of the following – your UK Passport, tax credits, P60 or a recent payslip.

In most cases, you'll be told straight away if your application is successful. In some cases, HMRC may need to do some additional checks to confirm whether you're eligible, so it's important to apply in good time. If you're found not to be eligible HMRC will tell you why.

I don't have access to the internet. How do I apply?

If you need assistance or do not have access to the internet, you can call the childcare service helpline on 0300 123 4097 and apply over the phone.

I applied for 30 hours/Tax-Free Childcare and am ineligible.

What other help can I get with my childcare costs?

All 3 and 4 year olds are eligible for the universal 15 hours a week of free early learning. [Childcare Choices](#) has a Childcare Calculator where you can learn more about which government offers might be best for you, whether you are likely to be eligible and how to apply.

Using 30 hours free Childcare

What do I do once I've opened my childcare account?

Once you open your childcare account you'll see a screen called 'Your childcare service account'. From here you can:

- Find your 30 hours free childcare code, by clicking on the link '30 hours free childcare'. Codes usually start '500'.
- Use the 'Your Tax-Free Childcare account' link to pay money into your account, add a childcare provider, pay your provider or set up regular childcare payments.

Check your messages by clicking on the 'Secure messages' link. Your eligibility response will be in here, as will your Tax-Free Childcare payment reference number. You need to give this to your childcare provider, to help them match your payments to your child.

When can my child access a 30 hours place?

You can claim 30 hours from the term after:

- your child turns three, and
- the date you receive your eligibility code from HMRC. Whichever date is later.

How do I take up a 30 hours place with my provider?

Once you have an eligibility code you should take it to your provider to be checked and to reserve your place in good time. Your provider must check your code before you take up your 30 hours place.

What can I expect to pay for using 30 hours?

Just like at school, your childcare provider can charge for additional services, for example, lunch, trips or music classes. These charges cannot be a condition of accessing your 30 hours place and alternative arrangements should be made available. Any charges should be itemised and cannot be a supplementary 'top-up'. You should speak to your provider for further information about any additional charges.

My provider isn't offering the full 30 hours, can I take up the remaining hours with another provider?

Yes, you can split the free entitlement between multiple providers. However, you cannot use more than two sites in one day as we believe continuity of care is important for a child's learning, development and wellbeing.

Do I have to use all the 30 hours per week?

No, you can take up any amount of childcare up to a maximum of 30 hours per week over 38 weeks.

Is 30 hours only available in term time or all year round?

Like the existing 15 hours, eligible parents are entitled to 30 hours a week in each of the 38 weeks of the academic year. However, you can stretch this offer over up to 52 weeks of the year, for instance, you can take 22 hours a week for 52 weeks, or just under 24 hours for 48 weeks. You should speak to your provider about how they are offering 30 hours.

How do I know which providers in my area are offering 30 hours?

We, as your local authority, will be able to provide details of providers in areas that are offering 30 hours places.

Can I use Tax-Free Childcare at the same time as 30 hours?

Yes, you can get Tax-Free Childcare and 30 hours free childcare at the same time. You can't get Tax-Free Childcare at the same time as tax credits, childcare vouchers or Universal Credit. You can also get 30 hours free childcare alongside these schemes.

Using Tax-Free Childcare

How do I pay my provider using Tax-Free Childcare?

Your provider needs to sign up before you can pay them using Tax-Free Childcare. They can go to childcarechoices.gov.uk/providers to find out more and sign up. Once they've signed up, you can add them to your childcare account by clicking on the 'Your Tax-Free Childcare account' link on your account homepage. You can pay them directly through your childcare account, and can also set up a regular payment on a chosen day each month.

When you pay money in, it will take 24 hours to clear before you can pay your provider. Payments to childcare providers will take three days to arrive in their account. When you apply for Tax-Free Childcare, you'll be given a unique reference number for your child. You need to give this number to your childcare provider so that they can match your payments to your child. You can find this in your welcome pack by clicking the 'Secure messages' link on your account homepage.

How do I find out if my childcare provider is signed up for Tax-Free Childcare?

Tens of thousands of providers have already signed up. You can search for your provider in the 'Your Tax-Free Childcare account' section of the account homepage. If your provider is registered as sensitive with their regulator – perhaps because they're a childminder working from their home address – you'll need to search for them using their regulator ID and postcode.

Reconfirming your eligibility

How often do I have to reconfirm my eligibility?

You will need to reconfirm you are still eligible for 30 hours and Tax-Free Childcare every three months, using your childcare service account, even if you have not yet taken up your place. It's easy to do; if your details have not changed you just tick a box to confirm this. You'll be reminded to do this 4 weeks before the reconfirmation deadline. It's important you let us know if your circumstances have changed, as they will be checked against other systems.

If you miss the reconfirmation deadline, you will receive a message telling you that your eligibility has lapsed. You should go into your childcare account and reconfirm.

If you reconfirm and you're no longer eligible, or do not reconfirm, you may be able to continue your 30 hours childcare place for a short period known as the grace period.

What happens if I reconfirm and am ineligible?

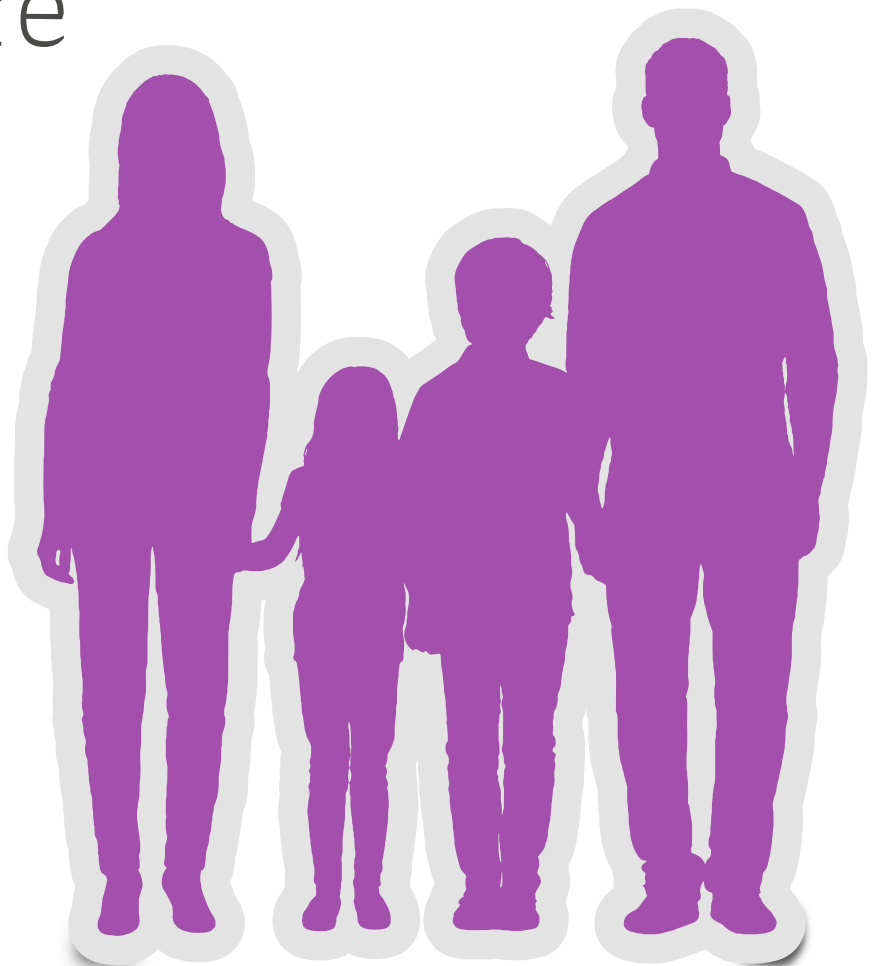
If you are no longer eligible for 30 hours, you will enter a grace period where you may be able to retain your 30 hours free childcare for a short period of time. You should check your grace period arrangements with your provider.

If you are no longer eligible for Tax-Free Childcare, you can still use the money in your account (including the top-up you accrued while you were eligible) to pay your provider. You can also continue to use your account to pay your provider in future, but you won't get the government top-up.



Childcare Choices

Top things providers need
to know about Tax-Free
Childcare



HM Government

Why do I need to sign up for Tax-Free Childcare?

You will need to sign up so that parents can pay you using Tax-Free Childcare. All registered providers have received an invitation letter, containing the unique ID you need to sign up. Signing up is straightforward, and should take less than 10 minutes.

Once you've signed up, parents will be able to add you to their account and start paying you directly using Tax-Free Childcare.

I'm a provider, but I don't know my Unique Tax Reference – how do I sign up?

You can't sign up to Tax-Free Childcare without your UTR. You'll need your UTR and the postcode this is linked to e.g. your business address, personal address, registered office. You can find these on previous tax returns or other communications from HM Revenue and Customs.

If you're a registered charity, and don't think you have a UTR, please call the helpline on **0300 123 4097** and they will tell you how to sign up.

I've signed up, how do I find out which child a payment is for?

When parents make payments to you via their childcare account, the payment will appear alongside their unique child reference number in your bank account. Parents are given these reference numbers in their welcome packs when they sign up to Tax-Free Childcare. These reference numbers are made up of the first letter of the child's first name, the first three letters of their surname, a five digit number and 'TFC'. For example, John Smith may have the reference JSMI12345TFC. Parents are encouraged to pass these numbers on to you, to support you in matching payments to individual children.

However, if you are having trouble matching which child a payment relates to, you can submit a payment reconciliation form. You can find this form on childcarechoices.gov.uk/providers

I've signed up. A parent has been trying to pay me using Tax-Free Childcare, but can't find me when they search for the name of my business. Why is this?

You might be designated as sensitive by your regulator. This could be because you're a childminder working from your home address. There's an extra layer of security in the system for these providers, and parents will need to search for you using your regulator ID and postcode.

If you don't think you should be designated as a sensitive provider, you should contact your regulator.

I don't know my regulator ID, how do I find it?

If you don't know your regulator ID, you should check your regulator's website for guidance.

I've lost my user ID, how do I find it?

Please call the childcare service helpline on **0300 123 4097**.

I've never received an invitation to sign up to Tax-Free Childcare?

You have to be registered with the relevant regulator to receive an invitation to Tax-Free Childcare, e.g. Ofsted in England.

The invitation will contain your unique user ID and details of the other information you need to sign up to Tax-Free Childcare.

If you are registered with your regulator then an invitation will have been sent to your setting address. If you have not received your invitation then please call the childcare service helpline on **0300 123 4097** and your invitation will be re-sent.

If you share your setting address with another organisation, e.g. a church hall or a school, then please ask for your user ID to be sent out via recorded delivery marked for your attention.

I'm a nanny, how do I sign up for Tax-Free Childcare?

You can only sign up for Tax-Free Childcare if you're a nanny registered or approved by a [UK regulatory authority](#). More information on how to do this is available at gov.uk/register-childminder-childcare-provider/overview.

You will need your National Insurance number to complete sign up, rather than a Unique Taxpayer Reference.

Please be aware that registration with the UK regulatory authority can take up to 12 weeks and you will be required to pay a registration and annual fee. Once you have successfully registered, you will receive a letter inviting you to sign up for Tax-Free Childcare.

If you're registered, you should have received a letter inviting you to sign up to Tax-Free Childcare. If you didn't receive, or have lost your sign up letter, please contact the childcare service helpline on **0300 123 4097**.

A parent has made a payment to me but I haven't received it yet?

Payments from parent childcare accounts are made via BACS transfer. Payments will therefore take around three working days to arrive in your account.

Email/content for parents

Subject line: Government launches new schemes to help with childcare costs



Dear parent,

Are you looking for support with childcare costs?

Getting financial help with your childcare costs is easier than you might think. [Childcare Choices](#) brings together all the government childcare offers in one place for the first time, including two new schemes for working parents: Tax-Free Childcare and 30 hours free childcare.

Use the Childcare Calculator on [Childcare Choices](#) to see what offers are available to support you and your family.

To find out more about the new and existing offers, and how they can help you, go to the [Childcare Choices](#) website today.



Email for providers

Subject line: Sign up now for Tax-Free Childcare



Dear provider,

Hundreds of thousands of parents have now successfully applied for Tax-Free Childcare and 30 hours free childcare through the childcare service.

Sign up to receive Tax-Free Childcare payments now at: childcare-support.tax.service.gov.uk

You'll need:

- Your user ID and the postcode held by your regulator;
- Your bank account details (to receive childcare payments); and either
 - Your business 10 digit Unique Taxpayer Reference (UTR) and the postcode on your tax record (e.g. your business address, personal address, registered office). You can find these on previous tax returns or other communications from HM Revenue and Customs. The postcode used must be one on your tax record; or
 - Your National Insurance number, if you're a nanny/employed childcare provider and don't have a UTR.

If you're a registered charity and don't have a UTR please phone the helpline on **0300 123 4097**.

Tax-Free Childcare was introduced in April 2017 and helps working families with the cost of childcare. For every £8 a parent pays into their childcare account, the government will add an extra £2, up to a maximum of £2,000 per child per year (or £4,000 for disabled children).

Once you've signed up, parents can then use their Tax-Free Childcare account to make childcare payments directly into your bank account.

For further information on both Tax-Free Childcare and 30 hours free childcare, please visit childcarechoices.gov.uk/providers. You will also find information in our stakeholder toolkit to help you advertise the scheme to your parents.

If you are interested in offering 30 hours free childcare please contact your local authority for further information.

Social media

One of the quickest and easiest ways to share messages is through social media. You are welcome to use the examples below on your social media accounts, or in other communications, such as emails, your website or digital screens.

Apply now, if you want 30 hours **free** childcare from January
childcarechoices.gov.uk



Childcare Choices HM Government

1. #30hours of #childcare for 3 and 4 year olds. Check you're eligible at childcarechoices.gov.uk

To keep your 30 hours childcare place **You** need to check your details are up to date every 3 months. Go to gov.uk/childcareaccount



Childcare Choices HM Government

2. Parents, make sure your details are up to date. You need to do this every three months gov.uk/sign-in-childcare-account #30hours #Childcare

Not sure what support **You** could get with childcare costs? Go to childcarechoices.gov.uk



Childcare Choices HM Government

3. Find out more about the new government childcare offers at childcarechoices.gov.uk

Log in to your childcare account every **3** months to check your details are up to date. Go to gov.uk/childcareaccount



Childcare Choices HM Government

4. Parents, to keep your #30hours #childcare place next term, make sure your details are up to date gov.uk/sign-in-childcare-account

Glossary

Approved childcare: You can only take up 30 hours free childcare at an approved provider, this means they must be registered by an appropriate regulator. e.g. not a family member.

Childcare Calculator: The online tool allowing parents to check how much support they can receive from the government towards childcare costs. The Calculator is available on the [Childcare Choices](#) website.

Childcare Choices: The government's childcare offers website, childcarechoices.gov.uk

Childcare service: The government service and website where parents can apply for both 30 hours free childcare and Tax-Free Childcare.

Childcare service account: The online government account where parents can manage their details, reconfirm eligibility and make Tax-Free Childcare payments. Parents apply through the childcare service to open a childcare service account.

Code validation: The check undertaken by childcare providers to ensure the eligibility code provided is legitimate.

Eligibility code: The code provided by the childcare service for a parent eligible for 30 hours free childcare. This usually starts with 500.

Reconfirmation: Every three months parents will need to reconfirm their eligibility by checking their details are up to date. The childcare service account is used to reconfirm eligibility for 30 hours and Tax-Free Childcare.

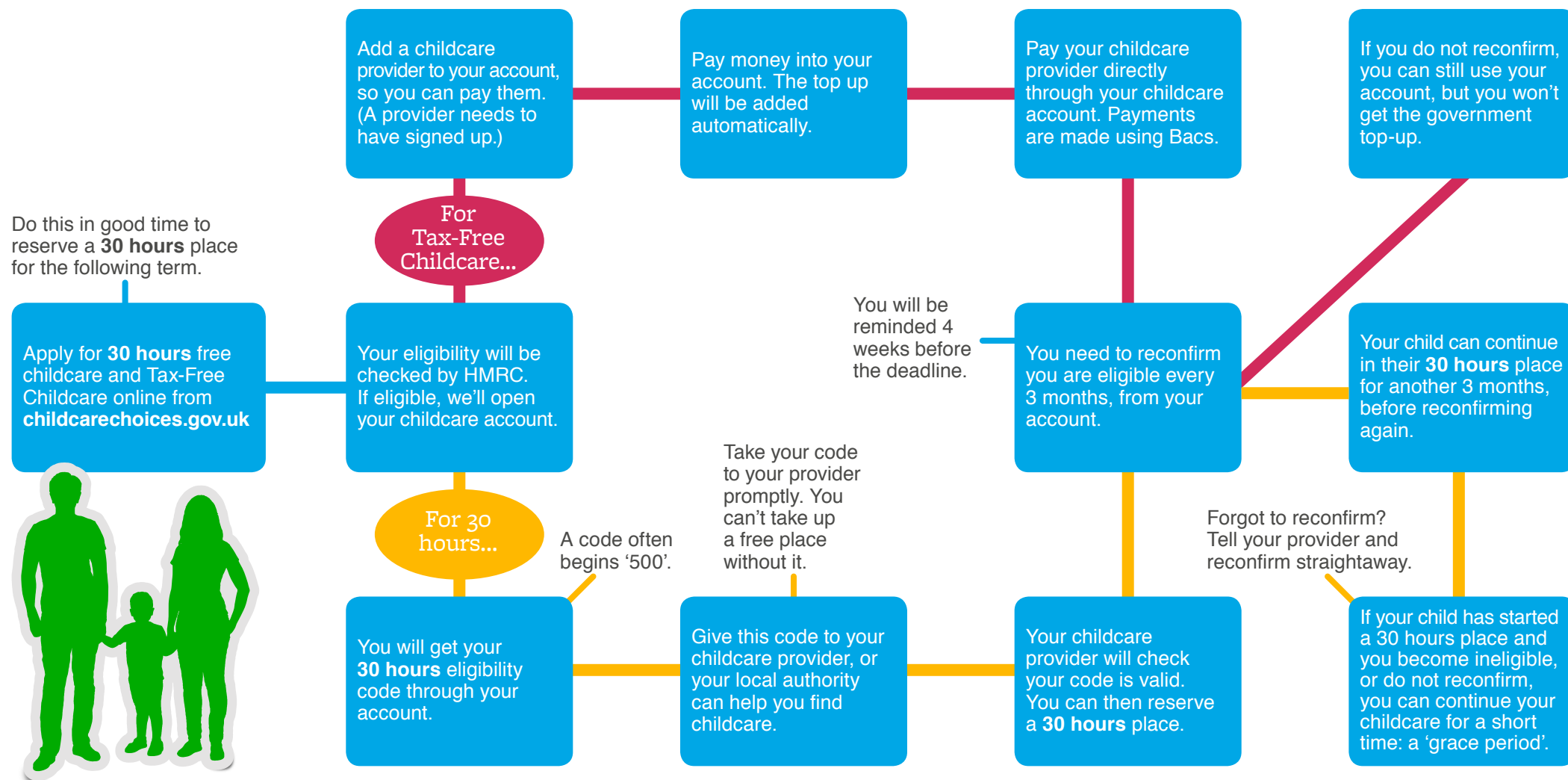
Regulator ID: The ID given to childcare providers by their regulator (for example, Ofsted, CSSIW etc.).

Sensitive providers: Some providers are designated as sensitive by their regulators. This might be because they're a childminder working from their home address. To pay these providers using Tax-Free Childcare, parents need to search for them using their regulator ID and postcode.

Unique Taxpayer Reference number/UTR: The code childcare providers need to sign up for Tax-Free Childcare. Businesses are given a UTR when they register with HMRC for tax purposes.

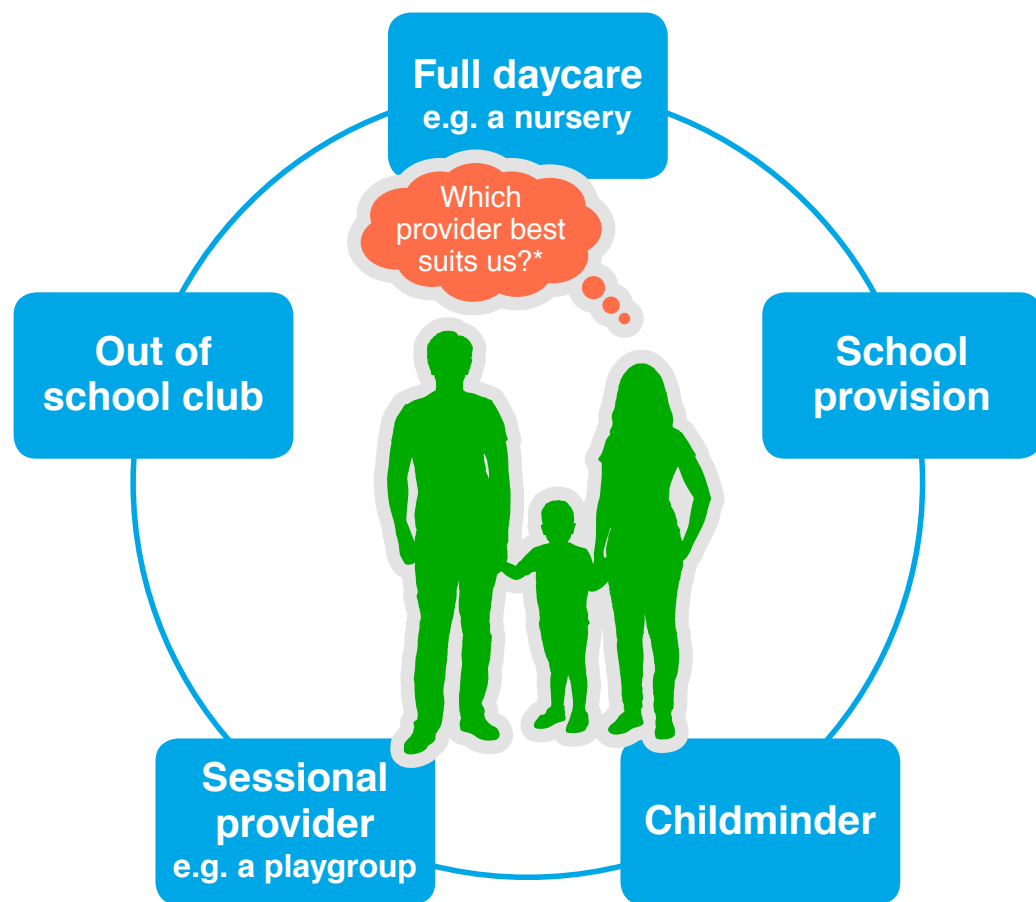
User ID: The unique code childcare providers receive in their letter inviting them to sign up for Tax-Free Childcare.

Your new childcare account



Check your childcare options at childcarechoices.gov.uk

Tips on using my 30 hours free childcare



* You can only take up 30 hours at an approved provider, this means they need to be a school, registered by Ofsted or a Childminding Agency.

Different childcare arrangements work for different families. When deciding, you might want to consider the following:

- You can take up your 30 hours between 6am-8pm, but no session can be more than 10 hours.
- You don't have to use all 30 hours, just those that meet your needs.
- Providers have a choice whether to offer the hours, some may not offer the full 30 hours.
- You can split your hours between providers.
- Splitting is limited to a maximum of two sites per day. Remember to get your 30 hours code checked by all the providers you use.
- 30 hours is available for 38 weeks of the year (just like the existing 15 hours scheme). Some providers will allow you to 'stretch' your 30 hours entitlement over 52 weeks of the year meaning fewer hours per week (e.g. you could take 22 hours a week for 52 weeks).

Speak to your provider about whether they offer 30 hours or contact your local authority for further information about accessing the right childcare for you.