

West Sussex Employer's Toolkit: helping your employees to understand childcare offers

Contents

Introduction	3
Why is it important to support your employees in understanding different types of childcare?	3
What government help is available to support parents with childcare costs?	4
How to promote information on childcare cost support to employees	8
Action plan – how to keep on top of sharing information about childcare support with your employees.....	9
Useful links.....	10
Contact us	10

Introduction

Childcare is the care and education provided at any setting in which a child is looked after without a parent/carer being present. This may be at a:

- pre-school,
- day nursery,
- childminder,
- breakfast club,
- after school club, or
- holiday play-scheme.

You may need to use childcare if you are working, studying, training or simply need some time without your children. However, you may also want your child to attend childcare for new opportunities to play, socialise and for their learning and development.

There is a range of childcare support available from the government however some parents/carers are unaware of what they are entitled to and how to access it. As an employer, it is important to understand and promote the different forms of childcare offers so that you can support your employees in continuing to work. The information provided in this toolkit will aid you in doing this.

Why is it important to support your employees in understanding different types of childcare?

High quality childcare is good for all of us: parents, carers, employers, communities and, most importantly, children.

In England, children can attend early years provision between the ages of 0 and 5. This is an important developmental point in their lives. From birth to age 5, a child's brain develops more than at any other time in life. The brain is at its most receptive during these first five years which means that early experiences and learning have a huge impact on the rest of their lives. Early child development has a direct impact on children's behaviour, social skills, emotional boundaries, ability to form close relationships, school readiness and level of achievement, even into adulthood.

It is important to note that parents and carers of children who are older than 5, are also able to access childcare outside of mainstream education in the form of breakfast/after school clubs and holidays play-schemes. There is support in accessing this provided by the government.

Supporting parents and carers to remain in or return to work will not only increase their family income but will also improve productivity by retaining valuable skills in the economy. Feeling supported in your place of work is a key factor in parents staying in their workplace.

From an employer perspective, the support you can provide to employees to access information about childcare can have a positive impact on recruitment, retention and engagement with your workforce. The use of childcare will affect how and when people are able to work. Helping parents and carers to access childcare will ensure a positive stance on the productivity, flexibility and satisfaction of your parent workforce.

What government help is available to support parents with childcare costs?

The government offers a range of support for working parents wanting to access childcare. The amount of support a parent is given is dependent on which childcare scheme they use. The amount they are entitled to also depends on the age of their child and their family circumstances. To access childcare offers, parents need to use approved childcare: this means a registered childminder, pre-school, nursery, out of school club or a nursery class in a school.

Examples of the support available can be found below.

Tax-Free Childcare

Eligible parents can get up to £500 every 3 months (up to £2,000 a year) for each of their children to help with the costs of childcare. This goes up to £1,000 every 3 months if a child is disabled (up to £4,000 a year). It is important to note that monies paid into the account can be 'saved up' to use for holiday play-schemes for those parents who have school aged children and do not need childcare during the school term.

Wraparound provision refers to childcare that is provided before or after school for primary school aged children. Typically, this would be a breakfast club or afterschool provision that runs until 6pm or later. From September 2026, most schools will offer, either directly or in partnership with another provider, a full wraparound childcare offer.

It is also important to remember that Tax-Free Childcare can be used by parents that are working but are on sick or annual leave, or on shared parental, maternity, paternity or adoption leave and you are going back to work within 31 days of the date you first applied.

The full eligibility criteria and application process can be found here: [Apply for Tax-Free Childcare - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-tax-free-childcare)

Early Years Funded Entitlement for Working Families

Early Years Funded Entitlement (EYFE) refers to the funding that is provided by the government to providers and should be free at the point of delivery. This offer is available for those parents who work the equivalent of 16 hours at the national minimum wage, or more per week. It is available to children aged 9 months to 5 years (statutory school age).

Up to 30 hours per week (1140 hours per year) of funded childcare is available for children from the term that begins after they turn 9 months old and lasts until the term after the child turns 5 years old (if the parent remains eligible). This can be spread over 38 weeks in line with school terms, from a pre-school, nursery or childminder registered to offer free places. Some providers will allow parents to 'stretch' the hours over 52 weeks, using fewer hours per week

It is worth noting that eligible parents will be provided with a code which will need to be re-confirmed every three months and before the start of the next term.

2 year old Local Authority Issued Early Years Funded Entitlement

There is additional funding available for some eligible 2 year old children that is administered by the Local Authority. Applications can be made via an income based or a non-income based application.

- The income-based application can be made if the parent is in receipt of income support, income-based Jobseekers allowance, universal credit or other benefits. For a full list of criteria and how to apply, please visit - [2 year old Local Authority Issued Early Years Funded Entitlement - West Sussex County Council](#).
- The non-income-based application can be made if the child is adopted, has a special guardianship order or has a special educational need or a disability (SEND). There are other criteria which can be found here - [2 year old Local Authority Issued Early Years Funded Entitlement - West Sussex County Council](#).

Children can use up to 15 hours per week (570 hours per year) of funded childcare from the term that begins after they turn 2 years old. This funding will last until the term after the child turn 3 years old. This can be spread over 38 weeks in line with school terms, from a pre-school, nursery or childminder registered to offer free places. Some providers will allow parents to 'stretch' the hours over 52 weeks, using fewer hours per week

Universal Early Years Funded Entitlement

Universal EYFE is available for all 3 and 4 year olds. Children can use up to 15 hours per week (570 hours per year) over 38 weeks in line with school terms. Some providers will allow parents to 'stretch' the hours over 52 weeks, using fewer hours per week. A child moving to reside in England from another country is entitled to the universal offer on the same basis as any other child, regardless of whether they have a British citizenship.

The below table outlines the expansion of childcare and when the changes have/will come into place:

Expansion of Childcare Offers					
Offer	Present Offer	From April 2024	From Sept 2024	From Sept 2025	From Sept 2026
2 year old Free Entitlement* Applications made direct to Local Authority. Parent(s) in receipt of one or more income-based benefits or meet other criteria.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2 year old Free Entitlement – Expanded	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Under 2s Free Entitlement – 15 hours Expanded Available term after turn 9 months (TBC once statutory guidance published in Spring 2024).	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
Under 2s Free Entitlement – 30 hours Expanded	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
3 and 4 year old Free Entitlement – Universal*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3 and 4 year old Free Entitlement – Extended*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wraparound Care – Primary school aged children (5-11) Currently all schools can offer wraparound on their own or in partnership with external providers, but this is not mandatory. From 2026 this will be mandatory.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ (must)
✗ = Offer not available ✓ = Offer is available					

Universal Credit Childcare Support

If you pay for childcare while you go to work, Universal Credit can pay some of your childcare costs. This includes holiday play-schemes, after-school clubs and breakfast clubs. If you live with a partner, you both need to be working, unless your partner cannot look after your children. Those parents who are eligible for universal credit may be able to claim back up to 85% of their childcare costs. This could equate to up to £951 back each month for one child or £1,630 for 2 or more children.

For further information and how to claim, visit here [Universal Credit: How to claim - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/how-to-claim)

Which offer is best?

Each family has its own unique needs and circumstances. It is best for the parent to do their own research to determine firstly, which support they are eligible for and secondly, compare the support to see which better suits their needs. We recommend sharing the below resources with employees who are parents:

- The Best Start in Life parent hub
The Best Start in Life parent hub website shows what childcare support is available for parents. This quick and easy tool will show your employees what options are available with full details on how to apply - [Homepage](#) | [Best Start in Life](#)
- Childcare Calculator
Parents can use the government's Childcare Calculator to find out which option is best for them. Another comparison tool, it gives a more in depth look at what each employee is entitled to - [Check what help you could get with childcare costs - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

It is also worth noting that some childcare funding schemes can be used in conjunction with one another as per the image below.

How the government childcare offers interact

Parents are encouraged to check the Childcare Choices website for more information and to use the childcare calculator to find out which support is best for their individual circumstances.

With...	Can you get...					
	Tax-Free Childcare	15 hours	30 hours	Tax credits	Universal Credit	Childcare vouchers
Tax-Free Childcare		✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
15 hours	✓		✓	✓*	✓*	✓
30 hours	✓	✓		✓*	✓*	✓
Tax credits	✗	✓*	✓*		✗	✓*
Universal Credit	✗	✓*	✓*	✗		✓*
Childcare vouchers	✗	✓	✓	✓*	✓*	

* 15 and 30 hours childcare and childcare vouchers will reduce a parent's tax credit or universal credit award

How to promote information on childcare cost support to employees

Some parents and carers are able to find suitable childcare as soon as it is needed whereas others may take longer to find a provider that accommodates their needs. Childcare may be needed close to where they live or close to where they work. It might be needed in the morning or evening or just during school holidays. You also need to think about parent carers who have children with SEND and if there are any extra considerations to be made to support them to access childcare.

The Family Information Service (FIS) is provided by West Sussex County Council. The FIS offers free, impartial and up to date information to all families on childcare as well as activities and services for 0-25 year olds. You can use the website to search for registered childcare in West Sussex. The FIS also offers an extra help to find childcare service which parents and carers can use if they are struggling to find childcare or have more complex needs. All information can be found on the following web page – [Childcare options - West Sussex County Council](#)

You should regularly remind parents to think about their childcare needs and support them to utilise the help that is available to them in accessing childcare.

Action plan – how to keep on top of sharing information about childcare support with your employees

The below action plan might be useful for you to think about the different ways in which you can regularly remind your parent workforce to think about their childcare needs.

Action – what are you going to do?	Resources – what do you need to make this happen, such as budget or people?	Evaluation – how will you measure if this has been successful?	Impact – what difference will this make in the short and long term?	Timescale – how long do you think this will take to implement?
Find out the childcare needs of your workforce:				
Set up staff networks to support parents:				
Support staff with their own research:				
Use a range of communication tools:				

Useful links

Below are some useful links that can be regularly shared with your employees:

- Help promote the expansion of childcare offers to parents. Encourage parents to check their eligibility and sign up to news/alerts as soon as they are available:
 - [Expansion of Childcare Support - West Sussex County Council](#)
 - [Homepage | Best Start in Life](#)
- Help promote the EYFE offer to parents and support parents to apply for funding:
 - www.westsussex.gov.uk/fundedchildcare
- Promote the Family Information Service
 - www.westsussex.gov.uk/fis
 - Encourage parents to follow our Facebook page for updates
www.facebook.com/FISWestSussex

Contact us

Family Information Service

📞 www.westsussex.gov.uk/FIS (childcare website)

📞 www.westsussex.gov.uk/helpfindingchildcare (can be used by parent/carers who need extra support in finding childcare)

✉ family.info.service@westsussex.gov.uk

📞 01243 777807 weekdays 8.00am-6.00pm

- Follow and like the FIS Facebook page [@FISWestSussex](#).

Early Years Funded Entitlement team

📞 www.westsussex.gov.uk/fundedchildcare

✉ eyfe@westsussex.gov.uk

📞 01243 777807 weekdays 8.00am-6.00pm