

**Free Early Learning for three and four year olds
Updated February 2018**

This factsheet is produced by the Family Information Service and outlines the universal entitlement of 570 hours of Free Early Learning per year for three and four year olds.

We have also produced a factsheet about the extended entitlement of 1140 hours per year for three and four year olds whose parents are working. Visit www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/childcarefunding

The Family Information service can offer a wide range of information and advice for parents and carers in Brighton & Hove including

- Support for families and where to go for help
- Information and advice about childcare options and funding

For more information

- Search online for childcare, services for families and factsheets www.familyinfobrighton.org.uk
- Visit our website: www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/fis

Need extra help?

- Email: familyinfo@brighton-hove.gov.uk
- Telephone: 01273 293545

Our range of factsheets to view online at www.familyinfobrighton.org.uk	
Tax free childcare	A new scheme for working parents being introduced in April 2017
Free childcare for two year olds	Some two year olds are now entitled to 570 hours of free childcare over the year
New to Brighton & Hove	Information on services, activities and local information for families who are new to the city.
30 hours free childcare	Three year olds whose parents are working can now get 30 hours of free childcare
Family Breakdown	What to consider when relationships break down and where to go for help and advice.
Family Finance	Overview of the different types of financial support available to families

What is the Early Years Free Entitlement (EYFE)?

The EYFE is funding given by the government to local authorities to provide free, part time early learning for all three and four year olds. Early learning will help your child develop and learn through a range of play activities in a safe and structured environment.

All childcare providers offering EYFE must be registered with Ofsted and deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). This is the framework that describes how all early years providers should work with children and their families to support their development and prepare them for starting school. For more information on the EYFS, visit www.direct.gov.uk/eyfs

When can my child start receiving their EYFE?

If your child's 3 rd birthday is between....	Free places start from:
1 st April – 31 st August	Autumn term, after the summer holiday
1 st September – 31 st December	Spring term, after the Christmas holiday
1 st January – 31 st March	Summer term, after the Easter holiday

Children are entitled to receive EYFE up until the term in which they turn five (compulsory school age). For children starting Reception class at a Local Authority School before they reach compulsory school age, their EYFE will be used by the school.

How many hours is my child entitled to?

The EYFE allows up to a maximum of 570 hours of free early learning over 12 months. This equates to 15 hours per week over 38 weeks of the year (split across 3 terms), however some providers may choose to deliver the hours flexibly.

For example, one provider of free early learning told us:

"We are an all year round nursery and offer parents the opportunity to claim up to 11.5 hours a week of free early learning over the whole year including school holidays"

30 hours free childcare for three year olds

If you are working, and your partner is also working if you are in a couple, you may be entitled to double the amount of free childcare you receive from 570 to 1140 hours per year.

You can view our factsheet at www.familyinfobrighton.org.uk or visit www.childcarechoices.gov.uk to apply for the funding.

NEW! Tax Free Childcare

Parents can open an online account and for every 80p they put in the account, the government will top up by 20p. This equates to a 20% addition, which is the amount of tax most people pay.

Find out more at www.childcarechoices.gov.uk

How will my child's free entitlement be offered?

There are national limits set by the government about how the free sessions can be offered, meaning that:

- No session can be longer than 10 hours
- No session can be shorter than 2.5 hours
- Sessions must not start before 8am or finish after 6pm
- A maximum of 15 hours per week can be taken, over at least 3 days
- You can split your child's entitlement between a maximum of two providers at any one time

You should discuss with each provider that you contact how they will spread the free hours over the week. Some may offer specific packages, whereas others may be flexible to your requirements.

Where can my child receive their entitlement to free early learning?

Most Ofsted registered early years childcare providers offer the free sessions. Your child can take up their entitlement at:

- Maintained/local authority nursery classes and schools
- Pre-school playgroups
- Nurseries at Children's Centres
- Some childminders and Childminder nurseries
- Day nurseries
- Independent School Nurseries and Private Nursery Schools

The Family Information Service's '**Childcare Choices**' booklet will give you a better understanding of these types of childcare to help you make the right choice for you and your child.

Will I have to pay anything?

If you only want your 15 hours per week free entitlement, then you should not be asked to pay anything.

However, as all childcare providers set their own criteria for admissions, they may not be able to offer you just the free hours.

It is important to bear in mind that some providers, such as day nurseries and childminders, mainly cater for parents who pay for extra hours of care.

If you are having difficulty in finding a childcare provider that can offer you just your free hours only, contact the Family Information Service.

If you take up any extra hours of childcare or extra services (for example, a hot meal or music classes) you will be charged for these. Here are some examples from providers showing when they make charges to parents / carers:

- "We offer morning sessions from 8.30am – 12.30pm and afternoon sessions from 1.45pm – 5.30pm. Parents can claim up to 3 hours free for each of these sessions and pay for the additional time. We also offer full days from 8.30am – 5.30pm where parents can claim up to 6 hours free and then pay for the rest of the day"

- “We are open four hours a day, during term-time only and lots of children come for four days a week (16 hours) and pay for the extra hour”
- “We are open for 47 weeks per year and offer the 15 hours per week during term-time only. Parents have to pay the full costs when using our setting in the holidays if they have been taking their 15 hours per week during term time”
- “If a child uses their free session over a lunchtime period, there would be a charge if they wanted a hot meal”

It is essential that you fully discuss your requirements with the provider before committing to taking up a place. This should include clarifying what extras they will charge you for, and what the costs of these extras will be.

Can my child attend more than one early years provider?

Yes. You can split your free entitlement between a maximum of two providers as long as you don't exceed your 570 hours per year.

For example, one provider said:

“I am a childminder and a parent takes 9 hours with me over two days a week and uses the rest of the time at a nursery.”

Please note that some providers may give priority to children who want to take up their full entitlement with that provider.

Can I use an early years provider in another local authority?

Yes. You can decide which early years provider is best for your child depending on the vacancies available and your circumstances. The process for applying for free early learning may differ in other local authorities, so make sure you get appropriate information from them.

What happens if I want to move my child from one early years provider to another half-way through a term?

You will need to advise both childcare providers of your intention as a ‘Change of Attendance Form’ will need to be completed. Your child’s remaining funding entitlement will be transferred to the new provider.

Remember, the new provider might offer their sessions in a different way to what you are used to, so make sure that you understand this before making a commitment.

I don't understand the way that my bill has been worked out

Arrange to speak with the manager at your provider in the first instance - preferably make an appointment to see them face to face. Ask them to explain the number of hours of free early learning they are offering your child, along with how much they are charging you for any extra hours of childcare or extra services. Keep a note of any discussions that you have and if you still feel the situation is unresolved, contact the Family Information Service.

Applying for and receiving free early learning

1. You should start to think about free early learning well before your child turns three. Demand for places at some settings is high, so it is advisable to register your child on a waiting list when they are around the age of two.

2. If your child already attends a childcare provider, find out if and how they offer the free early learning sessions. If your child does not already attend a childcare provider, or if you are not happy with the way that your current provider will offer the sessions, contact the Family Information Service who will listen to your requirements and provide you with a tailored list of providers.

3. Contact the providers you are interested in – request a brochure / prospectus, visit their website, read their inspection report on the Ofsted website (www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports) and contact them to arrange a visit or attend an open day.

4. Be sure to ask each provider that you visit or speak to how they offer the free early learning entitlement. Make sure that you are clear about any additional costs that you might have to pay, and get this in writing. Useful questions to ask include:

- When do you offer free early learning sessions?
- What vacancies do you have?
- Can I make use of just the free early learning entitlement without any additional costs?
- What costs do you charge for extra hours of childcare and / or extra services?
- Are there any other costs to pay (such as a registration fee)?
- What is the notice period for withdrawing my child from the setting?

5. Once you have decided on which provider (or providers) you would like to use, complete their application form / agreement / contract. Remember this is a private contract between you and the provider. As with all contracts, it is important that you read and understand all of the terms and conditions.

6. At the beginning of each term that your child is eligible for funding, your provider will ask you to complete a parents/carers certificate. You sign this to declare your claim, and must state the number of free hours you are claiming from the provider, and how many (if any) you are claiming at another provider.

7. Funding is paid directly to the childcare provider. They will invoice you for the costs of any extra hours of childcare or extra services you are using (if applicable).