

All about free childcare for two year olds

This factsheet has been produced by the Family Information Service (FIS) and aims to answer the questions we are most frequently asked by parents about free childcare for two year olds.

To check if you might be eligible for a place and to make an application, visit our website www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/twos

If you need some extra help, or aren't clear about anything in this factsheet, you can email us at familyinfo@brighton-hove.gov.uk or call our helpline on 01273 293545.

TIP!

** Remember, once you are eligible for a place, you stay eligible, even if your circumstances change, for example if you start work **

How much free childcare can my child have?

Your child can have a maximum of 570 hours per year of free childcare.

How are these hours spread out?

You could take a maximum of 15 hours per week during term time only (38 weeks per year), or if the childcare provider is open year round, you could take fewer hours every week but spread them across the year.

Your childcare provider may offer you **fewer than 570** hours a year. You do not have to accept this. You could choose a different childcare provider where your child will be able to get all their free hours.

Your childcare provider may offer you **more than 570 hours** a year but require you to pay for the additional hours. You do not have to accept this offer another childcare provider may be able to offer you just your free hours and you would not need to pay for additional hours.

When can my child start their free childcare?

When we email or write to you confirming your eligibility for a place, we will give you a reference number and the earliest date that your child can start in their place.

Your child can start their childcare from the start of the term after their second birthday on 1st January, 1st April or 1st September. Some providers only start taking children once they are two and a half.

TIP!

The exact date that your child can start may vary, for example if the 1st of the month is a weekend, if the provider is term time only and opens slightly later than the 1st of the month after holidays or if you choose a provider with a waiting list

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Can I join a waiting list?

If you are offered a place with a childcare provider and you want to wait, that is your choice. Remember that if you do not use your funding as soon as your child is able to start in a place, you will lose any time that you are entitled to whilst you are waiting for a place.

If my chosen provider doesn't currently offer two year old funding, can I wait until they are able to?

Firstly, you will need to check if the provider is planning to join the scheme and when. You could then wait for them to be able to offer free two year old places and the process can be fairly quick, if they meet all of the quality and other requirements.

As with the waiting list, you may want to think about how long you are prepared to wait, as you will lose the weeks of funding you do not/cannot use. You may need to keep in touch with the childcare provider to see how their application process is progressing.

TIP!

** You will lose any of the funded time that you do not use, so the earlier your child can start in a place the better. FIS can help you find other childcare providers if you cannot take up a place immediately at your chosen provider **

Where can my child get their free place?

There are a wide range of childcare settings that offer free places. You can choose from:

- Childminders
- Childminder nurseries
- Day nurseries
- Pre-school playgroups

Nearly all these settings will have a good or outstanding Ofsted grading. This means that you can feel confident that you are leaving your child in a safe and nurturing environment.

There may be some settings with a Requires Improvement/Satisfactory grading, but children can only attend these for their free sessions if we are confident that the childcare is good quality.

TIP!

It is really important that you choose carefully and ensure that you are happy with how the sessions are organised.

How can I find a place for my child?

You can search online for a place and download our Childcare Choices booklet at www.familyinfobrighton.org.uk.

Contact the childcare providers that you are interested in and arrange to visit. It's good to have a look at a few places to make sure that you can see what different childcare providers can offer. Our Childcare Choices booklet will help you to know what to look out for and what questions to ask when you visit.

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Key things to think about when choosing a place

- Give yourself plenty of time and visit several settings
- Make sure that you understand how the setting organises the free childcare sessions and that the times they offer them suits you
- If your child is already attending a setting and becomes entitled to free sessions, the days/times the free sessions are offered may be different to your existing sessions
- Make sure that you ask how the setting offers the free sessions once your child is 3 & 4. They may be offered at different times to the 2 year old free sessions.
- Think carefully about if you want your child to attend 15 hours a week term time only or if you would prefer them to attend 570 hours spread evenly across the year

Can I get some extra help to find a childcare place?

If you feel that you would benefit from some help, then contact the Family Information Service. We can let you know which childcare providers offer free places for two year olds and provide you with the support you need to find a place.

Can my child attend more than one childcare provider?

Yes, this could be a possibility as long as you do not go over your 570 hours per year and you split your entitlement between a maximum of two providers. The two childcare providers must work together to ensure that there is continuity of care for your child (for example sharing your child's development records).

Can my child attend a childcare setting anywhere in Sussex?

Yes your child can attend a setting outside Brighton & Hove, provided the childcare provider meets that local authority's quality requirements – check with that local authority whether they do. However you must apply to Brighton & Hove first to get your eligibility number.

Remember:

1. If your child is already in a place

If your child is already attending a setting and becomes entitled to free sessions, the days and times that the free sessions are offered, may be different to your existing sessions.

2. If you are looking for a place for your child

Make sure that you ask how the setting offers the free sessions, once your child is 3 & 4. They may be offered at different times to the 2 year old free sessions.

How can I make sure I choose the right childcare provider for my child?

What questions should I ask the childcare provider?

We have produced a useful checklist for parents to help you think about the things you need to know before taking up a childcare place. You can download a copy at www.familyinfobrighton.org.uk

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It is also important that you are given a copy of the provider's terms and conditions and read them carefully and ask questions if there is anything you don't understand. (You can also ask FIS to provide you with a copy, if you'd prefer)

How can I help my child settle in?

You should think about arranging a settling in period with your childcare provider. This will give both you and your child the opportunity to get to know the environment and the people who will be looking after your child. Short sessions are best to begin with, and you can stay with your child for the first few sessions until they are familiar with their new surroundings

How will I know my child is safe and well cared for?

All childcare providers are registered with Ofsted which carries out inspections to make sure that the premises are safe and that the staff are suitably qualified and trained to look after your child. You can ask to see the childcare provider's Ofsted report when you visit, or you can go to www.ofsted.gov.uk and view reports online. Although it is important to look at Ofsted reports, it is equally important that you find out as much as you can about a childcare provider before making a final decision.

Will I have to pay anything?

No, the childcare is free for parents and you should not be asked for any money or contribution towards costs.

Deposit or administration fee

Some providers may ask for a small deposit to secure your place, but this should be immediately refunded once your child starts. If you are asked for payment, or for a deposit that you feel is too high, contact us to discuss the matter.

Notice periods

It is very important to read your childcare provider's terms and conditions, particularly about their notice period. If your child is going to leave the provider for any reason, you must make sure that you understand how many weeks' notice you need to give them. If you do not give your provider enough weeks' notice of your child leaving, you could be asked to pay for the childcare for the full notice period.

Are there any other costs or 'top-up' fees?

- If extra hours are available at your childcare provider, you can choose to take them; however you will have to pay their standard fees for these hours.
- If your child stays for lunch, you may have to pay for food.
- You may also have to pay for any extra facilities or activities that you want your child to attend, for example, music or foreign language sessions.

Do I have to top-up the free hours with any extra payments?

No, the childcare is free for parents. If a childcare provider asks you to pay towards the cost of the childcare, please contact us to discuss the matter.

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How does two year old funding work with other childcare funding?

Families will always be better off taking up a free place because tax credits only contribute to a percentage of the full cost of a place, and not all of it. You can then top this up with additional childcare through Care To Learn or Childcare Grants, etc (student parents) or any extra hours you purchase and which are supported by the childcare element of Working Tax Credit (working parents).

Will I receive an invoice or other paperwork?

You should complete and sign an agreement with your childcare provider, before your child starts, to confirm your arrangement and to give the provider permission to care for your child.

You may receive a receipt for your funded place. You should receive an invoice from your childcare provider if you are paying fees on top of your funding, or if you need to arrange extra childcare hours because you are working or studying.

What happens if I don't understand any invoice that I have been given?

Ask your childcare provider to clearly explain any costs and how they have worked them out. Your free childcare sessions do not have a monetary value attached to them and this should be displayed clearly on your invoice.

Should I contact HMRC?

It is very important that you keep HMRC informed of any changes to your circumstances. If you receive tax credits and then take up a free childcare place, you must inform HMRC as soon as possible - either if your childcare costs stop or your average weekly costs go down by £10 or more. You can call the HMRC helpline on 0345 300 3900.

TIP!

** Before you agree to start with a childcare provider, make sure you ask if there are any additional costs, so ask them to provide you with details in writing. If you just want the free hours, make this clear to your provider.**

What happens when my child turns three?

Your child will continue to receive their free childcare until the term after their third birthday and will then continue to receive the free early learning to which all children are entitled, until they start their first year at school in September after their fourth birthday. Your childcare provider may want to offer your child different sessions when they turn three, though, so make sure that you check this with them as early as possible.

We have a separate factsheet on free early learning for 3 and 4 year olds – ask us for a copy or view online at www.familyinfobrighton.org

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Free childcare is good news for twos !

Parents tell us:

- My daughter loves nursery– before she did not eat anything and I was very worried. Now she eats everything.
- He is an only child so really helpful for him to be sociable. He learns good behaviour and independence at nursery.
- She loves being at nursery. Likes playing with all the other kids. She gets on well with all the staff.
- He's really enjoying it – he can concentrate better now so he can sit and paint and finish a painting. His speech has come along really fast. He is fully potty trained now.
- He loves it. His speech has got better. He eats lots of different things now. He eats fruit at nursery and he won't eat it at home.
- She did not have friends her age and now has lots of friends her age and loves playing with them.
- He has developed so much. Social skills, sleeping, speech he's a different child.
- It was hard at first getting him settled but it was worth it as now he just runs in really happily.

Free childcare is good news for you !

Parents tell us:

- The nursery funding has been so positive as I can make a future for us
- It's been a life saver you can catch up on life – Just have a bit of space.
- I get quiet time with the baby – the baby gets to sleep quietly without his brother waking him up.
- Gives me headspace and time to think about how to parent him – how to deal with tantrums and not get stressed.
- I needed a break because I've got an older one as well
- freedom to study and get back into work, if you use the time then it's plenty of time to get things set up
- I set up my own business and can now afford to pay for more hours
- The funding makes it possible for me to go to college.
- I get to spend time one to one with my new baby.
- I'm moving on to level 2 and maths GCSE in September 2014. I want to get my nursing degree once he starts school.
- I get to chill out and get things done.

How can the Family Information Service help you?

We also offer a wide range of information and advice to families in Brighton and Hove including:

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Childcare for children of all ages
Activities for children and young people

Services that can support families
Help with applying for a school place

Visit: www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/fis , email: familyinfo@brighton-hove.gov.uk or call: 01273 293545

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