Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for children

1. What is Disability Living Allowance for children?

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for children is a non-means tested benefit that provides help with the disability-related expenditure of looking after a disabled child aged under 16. People aged 16 or over cannot make a new claim for DLA and must claim Personal Independence Payment instead (see our separate factsheet for more information: royalgreenwich.gov.uk/personal-independence-payment).

DLA is paid in addition to other benefits and an award for your child may mean you qualify for more financial help such as disabled child elements in Universal Credit or to Carer's Allowance. A successful claim also opens other entitlements such as:

- exemption from the Benefit Cap;
- disability and possible carer premiums within Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support;
- national insurance carer's credits (gov.uk/carers-credit);
- possible extra Universal Credit for claimants who are carers;
- the Motability scheme (motability.co.uk).

You can claim DLA for children if you're in or out of work.

You won't automatically receive an award because your child has a certain condition, you also don't need a formal diagnosis to claim. DLA is awarded based on the difficulties the child has with mobility and/or personal care and the activities of daily living. For example, although having a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder will not automatically lead to an award, many children on the autism spectrum do qualify. You can therefore claim DLA before your child has a formal diagnosis.

2. How DLA is made up

DLA has two parts:

- **The Care Component** – for children who need a lot of extra personal care, supervision or watching over. The child's extra needs must be substantially more than a non-disabled child of the same age. This might be to make sure they keep safe, or do not endanger others, but it can also be with basic daily tasks such as getting dressed, washed, using the toilet, eating or drinking, developing daily living skills, using toys or communicating. The help can include things like extra checking to make sure they have done tasks satisfactorily or prompting and encouragement (perhaps because they are easily distracted).
- **Mobility Component** – for children who need help getting around or extra guidance and supervision outdoors.

Depending on the circumstances, the child could qualify for one, or both components at the same time.

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3. The Rates

DLA is payable at the following weekly rates.

Care component *(weekly figures)*

Payable from age 3 months (or from birth if the child is terminally ill).

	April 2026-2027 rate
Higher rate	£114.60
Middle rate	£76.70
Lower rate	£30.30

Mobility component *(weekly figures)*

	April 2026-2027 rate
Higher rate *Payable from age 3*	£80.00
Lower rate *Payable from age 5*	£30.30

Rates usually change in April each year

4. How to qualify for DLA

Residence conditions

To qualify for Disability Living Allowance (DLA), a child must usually satisfy the residence and presence conditions. These include:

- living in Great Britain for a certain amount of time:
  - Aged 3 to 16: at least 6 months in the last year.
  - Aged 6 months to 3 years: at least 6 months in the last 3 years.
  - Under 6 months old: at least 13 weeks.
- Being habitually resident in the UK, Ireland, Isle of Man or the Channel Islands.
- not being subject to immigration control.

There are many exceptions to the residence and presence conditions. For example, the presence conditions don't apply if a child is terminally ill. Special rules also allow claims from some people without the need for them to have previously lived in Great Britain. Examples include people who:

- were living in Ukraine before 1 January 2022 and left due to the Russian invasion who have leave or right of abode in the UK.
- have come to the UK from Afghanistan since 15 August 2021 through specified schemes (conditions apply).
- have refugee status or humanitarian protection.
- have been granted leave in the UK through a 'safe and legal humanitarian route'.

There are also exceptions for people with right of abode or leave to enter or remain in the UK who were living in Sudan before 15 April 2023 or in Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights or Lebanon before 7 October 2023 and left due to the violence there.

This isn't a complete list of exceptions and special rules may also apple for some EU nationals. The rules are complicated, so please call us for advice if you're unsure about your position (020 8921 6375, Monday and Thursday 10am to 1pm).

Disability conditions

The child's disability or health condition must mean one or both of the following apply:

- they need much more looking after than a child of the same age who doesn't have a disability;
- they have difficulty getting around.

They must have had these difficulties for at least 3 months and expect them to last for at least a further 6 months (see section 6 for more on qualifying periods). However, special rules apply to children who are terminally ill where death can reasonably be expected within twelve months – DLA can then be fast tracked and paid straight away (see section 8).

Care component

The rate the child gets depends on how much looking after they need, for example:

- lowest rate – payable if help is needed for some of the day or night;
- middle rate – payable if:
  - during the day - frequent help is needed with personal care or continual

supervision to keep them and/or others safe; or
- during the night - prolonged[1] or repeated[2] help is needed with personal care or they need another person to be awake to watch over them for a prolonged period or more than twice.

- **highest rate** – payable if help or supervision is needed both during the day and at night, or if they are terminally ill.

Mobility component

The rate the child gets depends on the level of help they need getting about, for example:

- **lowest rate** – if they can walk but need someone to guide and or supervise them when outdoors.
- **highest rate** – for those with severe walking difficulties who:
  - cannot walk
  - can only walk a short distance without severe discomfort,
  - could become very ill if they try to walk or who are blind or severely sight impaired.

  Some children with severe behavioural problems can also get this rate (see 'severe mental impairment' section for more information).

5. Age limits

There is no lower age limit for DLA care component. However, as there is a 3-month qualifying period, your child cannot normally be paid the care component until they are 3 months old. There is no qualifying period if your child is terminally ill – the care component can then be paid from birth.

The higher rate mobility component can start from when your child reaches the age of 3 and the lower rate from the age of 5. Claims for the mobility component can be made earlier, but payment will not start until the child has reached the relevant age.

6. Qualifying periods

To qualify for DLA the child must meet the conditions in the 'How to qualify for DLA' section throughout the three months before the claim and the six months after the start of the claim. This rule does not apply to children who are terminally ill.

If you claim DLA for your child within two years of the end of a previous award, the claims are linked together. This means that they don't have to serve the required period again if they qualify and can get DLA as soon as they reclaim but only at the previous rate and component. If they qualify for a different amount, they will have to serve the waiting period before DLA is paid.

7. Renal Dialysis

There are special benefit rules for some children undergoing renal dialysis to help them qualify for the middle rate care component. To qualify, your child must have this treatment regularly for two or more sessions a week and:

- either the dialysis is of a type which needs another person (other than hospital staff) to be there to watch over them or attend to their needs, or
- another person needs to be there while they are dialysing due to their circumstances (such as their age).

[1] Prolonged means for at least 20 minutes
[2] Repeated means at least twice

8. Terminal Illness

Children who are terminally ill will automatically get the highest rate of the care component – their claim will be fast tracked and there is no qualifying period. However, they will not automatically qualify for the mobility component - entitlement will depend on how their illness affects them. Phone the Disability Living Allowance helpline on 0800 121 4600 to start your claim. Ask a medical professional for form SR1.

9. Severe mental impairment

A child can qualify for higher rate of the mobility component if they have severe learning disabilities. To be entitled to the mobility component based on severe mental impairment, the child will need to meet certain conditions such as being entitled to the highest rate of the care component (even if it's not in payment, for example because they're in a care home).

If the child is not entitled to the higher rate of care on the basis of severe mental impairment then they may pass the test for the lower rate.

Children who are autistic or have a learning disability may qualify for the higher rate due to being virtually unable to walk for example, due to behavioural problems or interruptions to their walking which make their ability to make progress on foot so limited that they are virtually unable to walk. Check Contact A Family's website for more information.

10. Completing the claim form

Completing a DLA form involves answering a series of questions relating to the child's care, supervision and mobility needs. You will be asked to tick boxes for your answers to each question and there is space for you to expand on your answers. You may find it useful to keep a diary to help you complete the form. Please also read the accompanying information booklet that is included, it contains examples of how to complete the form.

Answer the questions as fully as you can and include copies of any additional information you may have with the form (such as medical reports from GP or other health care professional letters, statement of special educational needs, SENCO or CAMS report).

Contact us for advice if you are unsure how to complete the form and need support.

11. How to claim DLA

It's best to order a printed form to ensure that a successful claim is paid from the earliest possible date.

Call the DLA Helpline
Telephone: 0800 121 4600
Relay UK (if you cannot see or hear):
18001 0800 121 4600
Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

You will receive a dated form, any successful claim will be paid from the date the form was requested provided it's returned within 6 weeks.

You can also download a DLA form from www.gov.uk/disability-living-allowance-children - you have the option of either completing it on screen and printing it off, or you can print a blank form and complete it by hand. The form tells you where to send your application.

Please note that DLA can't be backdated. Forms printed from the internet will not be dated, so a successful claim will only be awarded from the date the DWP receive the completed form.

You can claim DLA if you look after the child as if you're their parent. 'Parent' includes step-parents, guardians, grandparents, foster-parents, and even older brothers or sisters.

It usually takes around 8 weeks to process a DLA claim.

12. If the claim is successful

You will receive a written decision telling you if the claim has been successful, and, if so, the components you have been awarded for your child and how long for.

Remember to notify the relevant benefit offices that you have been awarded DLA for your child as soon as possible.

If you get DLA for your child, you may now qualify for other linked benefits such as Carer's Allowance. If you already receive benefits (such as Housing Benefit or Council Tax Support) these may now increase.

You will also receive additional help if you're on Universal Credit (UC) and are awarded DLA middle or highest rate care component.

Use the free benefits calculator on the Royal Greenwich website to check if you are entitled to additional support. Borough residents can also call the Welfare Rights Helpline for a free benefit check (see section 15 for details).

Important note for families who have moved from legacy benefits to Universal Credit

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has completed the transfer of working age people from 'legacy benefits[3]' 'to Universal Credit (UC). If you were affected, you should have been notified that your legacy benefits were ending and invited to claim UC instead.

Many families with disabled children are worse off on Universal Credit (UC) because disabled child elements in UC are less generous than under legacy benefits for most children. In addition, the disabled child element cannot be included at all for children receiving lower rate DLA care awards.

But if you moved to UC through the government's managed migration programme and your UC entitlement was lower than the amount you previously received on legacy benefits, you should be receiving an additional amount in your UC to make up the difference. This **transitional protection**, aims to ensure you are not worse off at the point of transfer, but reduces or ends over time. Changes in your circumstances may also affect entitlement.

If your child receives DLA, check that any disabled child element due has been included in your UC award. Get specialist advice if you think your entitlement has been calculated incorrectly, particularly if you have moved to UC and are now worse off.

13. If you're unhappy with the decision

You have the right to challenge the DLA decision if the claim is refused or you get a lower rate for your child than you expect.

You can do this in the following ways:

- *Mandatory reconsideration (MR)* - you can ask for the decision to be reconsidered and the decision maker will look at your request and revise the decision if they agree. You must usually request this within **one month** from the date of the decision letter. This may be extended in special circumstances and if certain grounds are satisfied.

  Once the decision has been reviewed the decision maker will send you two copies of the MR notice - you will need the extra copy if you are still not happy and wish to appeal to an independent tribunal.

  Please note: you still have the right to appeal to an independent tribunal even if

[3] Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit, Housing Benefit

your mandatory reconsideration request is rejected because it is late.

- *Appeal* - you can appeal to an independent tribunal if you are unhappy with the outcome of the mandatory reconsideration. Many people who are initially refused DLA are then successful at tribunal. You normally have **one month** from the date of the mandatory reconsideration decision to submit your appeal. You must have asked for a reconsideration and had a decision on that request before you can appeal. If you miss the deadline, late appeals may be accepted if made within 12 months of the end of the initial one-month time limit.

- *Any time revisions and supersessions.* It may not always be possible to challenge a decision within the dispute period (or time limits), especially if there is a change in the child's circumstances. You can ask the decision maker to reconsider a decision at any time, however long ago it was made but only if certain grounds have been satisfied, such as:
  - → change in circumstances,
  - → new medical evidence,
  - → official error,
  - → error of law,
  - → incorrect facts,
  - → revision during an appeal process following the outcome of an earlier appeal etc.

The GOV.UK website includes further information about mandatory reconsiderations and appeals. Do get advice if you need to.

14. Other sources of support

Royal Greenwich provides targeted additional support for disabled children and their families. This includes a range of services such as holiday schemes and after school clubs. Please visit the council's website and look at the 'Local Offer' website for more information: www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/localoffer. Alternatively, contact Greenwich Families Information Service (020 8921 6921 or email fis@royalgreenwich.gov.uk).

If you have had a targeted short break and you still feel that you need more support to meet your child's outcomes, you can ask for an assessment of your child and family's needs. Call Royal Greenwich's MASH Team for details on 020 8921 3172 (or contact your child's allocated worker if they have one). A Child and Family assessment may be completed by a social worker or an Early Help Assessment may be recommended depending on your needs. You may be provided with a specialist short break service if the outcome of the Child and Family assessment is that you and your child need additional support. If you are offered a specialist short break, you can ask for a 'Direct Payment'. This allows you to have the money to purchase services yourself. This could include for activities for your child and for you to have a break from caring.

Family Fund

You may be able to get financial support from the Family Fund, which provides grants to families to cover the additional costs of caring for a disabled or seriously ill child under the age of 18.

Grants can be used for a wide range of items and activities – anything that helps make life easier – for example, essential household appliances like washing machines or tumble dryers, or a family holiday.

Apply online or find out more by visiting the Family Fund website (www.familyfund.org.uk) or call 01904 550 055.

15. How to get more information

If you need benefits advice or would like to check if you are missing out on any entitlements, ring Royal Greenwich's:

Welfare Rights Service
Public Advice Line
(for borough residents only)
020 8921 6375
Textphone 18001 020 8921 6375
Mon & Thurs: 10am -1pm

Drop-in face-to-face advice is available at locations around the borough (excluding public holidays) – find out more here: www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/advicehubs
Alternatively, visit the Royal Greenwich website (www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk) to view benefit pages or use our free online benefit calculator.

Children's Centres
Children's Centres provide a variety of services, advice and support for parents and carers in one place. These cover health, early learning, childcare and parenting support. There are services to help from pregnancy through to when the child reaches school-age. There are Children's Centres across the borough – visit the Royal Borough's website to find one near you, www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk

Greenwich Carer's Centre
Support organisation for carers in Greenwich. They have over 25 years' experience in supporting family carers and are there for when things get a little difficult.
Contact: 0300 300 2233
Email: info@greenwichcarers.org
www.greenwichcarers.org **Contact**
Contact (previously known as Contact a Family) is a registered charity for families with disabled children offering support, advice and information.
Helpline: 0808 808 3555
Monday to Friday 9.30am to 5pm
Send an online enquiry .
https://contact.org.uk

National Autistic Society website
The National Autistic Society is the UK's leading charity for autistic people and their families, offering support, information, and campaigning for better understanding and services. Services include a helpline, educational resources, training, and specialist support.
www.autism.org.uk

This factsheet is correct as of October 2026

ROYAL borough of GREENWICH

Welfare Rights Service
Woolwich Centre
35 Wellington Street
London SE18 6HQTelephone 020 8921 6375
Textphone 18001 020 8921 6375
www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk