# Benefits for children

## Introduction

If you have sight loss, or provide care for someone who does, there are a number of welfare benefits you may be entitled to. Some of these benefits can help provide you with an income if you are not able to work, while others can help towards the extra costs that often make life more expensive if you have a disability.

We have produced various factsheets to help you learn more about the benefits that you are most likely to be entitled to if your life is affected by sight loss.

In this factsheet we tell you about the different benefits that you can claim if you are the parent or guardian of a child who is blind or partially sighted and you are living in **England, Wales or Northern Ireland**. It focuses largely on Disability Living Allowance (DLA). We also tell you how to claim these benefits and where to get more help.

Benefits for children are different in **Scotland**, a new benefit called Child Disability Payment (to replace DLA) was introduced on 22 November 2021. The rules to qualify for this are slightly different to those for Disability Living Allowance. If you live in Scotland, please contact usand ask for our **Benefits for Children (Scotland) factsheet** or you can downloadit from our website **rnib.org.uk/benefits-children**.

### Disability Living Allowance

You can claim DLA if:

* you are the parent of a child **under 16** with sight loss
* and your child has had these problems for at least three months
* andyour child is expected to have these problems for at least six months.

DLA is administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), except in Northern Ireland where it is administered by the Department for Communities (DfC). For the rest of this factsheet, we refer to the DWP but the content equally applies to the administration of DLA in Northern Ireland, where the benefit is administeredby the DfC.

DLA consists of a **care** component and a **mobility** component. You can get a payment for one or both components. Many blind and partially sighted children should qualify for at least the lowest rate of both components (depending on their age).

You can claim the **care** component from your child’s date of birth, but it won’t go into payment for the first three months. There are three weekly rates of payment for it:

* lowest rate of **£26.90**
* middle rate of **£68.10**
* highest rate of **£101.75**

The earliest you can claim the mobility component for your child is when they are three years old. The higher rate is payable from theage of three years and the lower rate can only be paid from the age of five years.

There are two weekly rates of payment for the **mobility** component:

* lower rate of **£26.90**
* higher rate of **£71.00**

### Why should I claim DLA for my child?

You have nothing to lose and everything to gain from claiming DLA:

* you can receive DLA regardless of your other income as it is not a means-tested benefit
* DLA is tax-free
* it could increase your entitlement to other benefits and concessions, depending on the DLA award your child is given.

### The care component of DLA

Although you can claim the care component for your child from birth, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), cannot normally start paying this to you until your child is three months old.

### Qualifying criteria

#### Lowest rate

Your child should qualify if they need extra help or attention for a **significant portion** of the day. A significant portion means about an hour, which may be a single period or may be split into shorter periods during the day.

#### Middle rate

To qualify you must show that your child needs extra attention or supervision **throughout the** **day**.In other words, there are many occasions at different times of the day when your child needs attention or supervision that a sighted or able-bodied child of the same age would not require. Your child may also qualify if they need the required level of extra attention or supervision **during the night only**.

#### Highest rate

If your child needs extra help or supervision during **both** **the day and** **night**, they may be able to get the highest rate of the care component. If sight loss is your child’s only disability, it is unlikely that they will qualify for the highest rate of the care component, unless you can clearly demonstrate night-time care needs.

If your child has a terminal illness, they may be entitled to the highest rate of the care component, regardless of how long they have had the illness.

#### The additional requirements test

It is generally accepted that children, especially younger children, need some help and supervision. As well as meeting the above criteria you need to show that either:

* your child’s attention or supervision needs are substantially in excess of the normal requirements of children of their age; or
* your child has substantial attention or supervision requirements which younger children may also have, but which persons of their age without a disability do not have.

### Examples of needs that can lead to entitlement to the care component

#### Stimulation

A child with sight loss will need more active stimulation to enable learning and development. Very young children learn about their environment through exploration, encouraged by what they can see. Children with sight loss may not be able to see objects around them, so their desire to explore may be considerably less than a fully sighted child. As a result, you may need to introduce everyday objects through touch to your child. The DWP should treat this as an attention need, which can be considered in the qualifying criteria for DLA.

#### Communication

Developing communication skills is crucial for small children. A child with sight loss will need much more physical contact and verbal reassurance to encourage development of language and personal relationships. For example, your child may not be able to see smiles or other simple forms of communication and this in turn may affect social skills and bonding. Therefore, your child may need more contact by touch, cuddling and more verbal reassurance than a fully sighted child.

#### Development

Not all children develop at the same pace. However, it is possible to identify approximate ages by which children will have developed certain skills.

Because it can count as an attention need for DLA, you should highlight in your claim any additional help your child needs to achieve age-appropriate skills, such as the examples identified below:

* 6 – 10 months: sits up without support, crawls, pulls self up to stand, passes objects from hand to hand
* 8 – 12 months: picks up and eats food
* 10 – 16 months: walks unaided, drinks from a cup
* 14 – 24 months: uses a spoon to pick up and eat food, plays with building bricks, removes easy clothing, throws a ball
* 18 – 24 months: scribbles with a pencil or crayon, kicks a ball
* 2 – 3 years: pedals a tricycle, draws straight lines
* 3 – 4 years: uses a knife and fork
* 4 – 5 years: hops on one leg
* 6 – 7 years: independently enjoy a variety of activities and stay busy, liketo paint and draw, jump ropes, ride a bike, tie shoelaces, read independently, tell the time, explain objects and their use
* 8 – 9 years: jump, skip and chase, dress and groom self completely, use simple tools (e.g., screwdriver), know the date, enjoy collecting objects
* 10 – 12 years: like to write, draw and paint, meet with friends outside to play, listen to music, write stories, enjoy chatting on the phone or by text/applications.

#### Development through play

Blind and partially sighted children require much more active attention to assist and encourage them to play and develop; specially adapted or tactile toys alone are not enough. For example, your child may need help to locate a toy and pick it up after dropping it. Difficulties with locating or manipulating toys could frustrate your child. They may need assistance and encouragement so that they persevere with activities like drawing or painting.

Older children may require extra help to engage with age-appropriate activities such as social media, gaming, using smart phones and responding to non-verbal social cues when engaging with other people.

#### Extra help with dressing, bathing, feeding and other activities

A sighted child of the same age would need some help with these personal care tasks, but it is likely that your blind or partially sighted child will need **extra** support. This may count as attention for DLA purposes. For example, you may have to spoon-feed your child until a later age, or your child may be less able to manage with dressing, bathing or feeding themselves.

As your child gets older, they may continue to need help to ensure they are dressed appropriately and to manage their personal hygiene, particularly for girls needing to manage their menstrual cycle.

#### Supervision

All very young children require supervision. Children with sight loss require a greater level of supervision because of the increased risk of danger. For example, a play area that is safe for a sighted child could be hazardous to your child as there will be more risk of them tripping over or bumping into things. There may be an increased risk of bullying and/or peer pressure to play in a way that is unsafe for a child with sight loss.

#### Schooling

Children with sight loss may encounter additional difficulties once they start school. Some examples are reading from boards or textbooks, describing maps or diagrams (which may be impossible to represent in tactile form), and finding their way to, from and around school (young children will rarely have received long cane training). These all count as attention that your child requires.

Additionally, whilst your child is at school the following can also count as attention needs: identifying classmates and or teachers, locating and cutting up food at mealtimes and making sure they are clean after eating, changing into and out of PE clothes, locating and using PE equipment and ensuring they are clean after using paints or other messy materials. They may find it more difficult to use the toilet facilities at school than at home and need extra assistance with wiping, dressing and washing their hands at school.

#### Medication

Your child may need eye drops or other medication several times a day. This may take longer if they cannot see what is happening.

#### Night-time care

Most children with sight loss should qualify for the lower or middle rate care component for daytime care needs. However, if your child also needs help during the night because their sight loss and/or any other disabilities they have, they may be able to claim the higher rate. For example, you may need to take your child repeatedly to the toilet or give them medication during the night. The time you take to settle your child back to sleep can also count. **Night-time** means after the adults in the house normally have gone to bed.

### The mobility component of DLA and qualifying criteria

#### Lower rate

The DWP can award the lower rate of the mobility component to children aged 5 and over who need guidance or supervision when walking outdoors.

To qualify for the lower rate mobility component your child will need to satisfy the additional requirements test, this means that either:

* they require substantially more guidance or supervision than children of their age who don’t have a disability; or
* children of their age who don’t have a disability would not require such guidance or supervision.

For example, all young children need help when crossing busy roads but a child with sight loss will need **extra** help in locating a safe place to cross the road, recognising when it is safe to cross the road, and they will need attention so that they avoid bumping into obstacles or hazards on the pavement.

#### Higher rate – qualifying through sight loss only

Your child may qualify for the higher rate of the mobility component based on sight loss **alone**. The higher rate can be awardedfrom the age of three.

They will qualify for it if they are certified as **blind** (severely sight impaired) **and** one of the following criteria applies:

1. they have a visual acuity of less than 3/60 (they can read only the top line of an eye test chart from three metres away)
2. orthey have a visual acuity of 3/60 or more, but less than 6/60 (they can read only the top line of the eye test chart from six metres away) **and also have:**
* a complete loss of peripheral vision; and
* severely restricted central vision or tunnel vision which is less than 10 degrees in diameter.

If your child’s sight is too poor to be measured in this way, for example if they only have light and dark perception, they will qualify for the higher rate of mobility. If your child’s visual acuity is 6/60 or better, they will **not** qualify, for example if their visual acuity is 6/36 or 6/18.

It can be hard to accurately measure a young child’s visual acuity, and your child may not be registered yet so won’t have a Certificate of Vision Impairment (CVI), or equivalent. If your child’s sight cannot be measured in these terms the DWP may contact your child’s consultant ophthalmologist to ask their opinion. However, if you have any letters or information about their level of sight loss, it is generally useful to send them to the DWP with your claim.

#### Higher rate – qualifying through sight loss and other health problems

If your child cannot qualify for the higher rate of mobility component because of sight loss alone, they may qualify because of an additional disability or health problem. For example, the DWP can pay the higher rate to children who are unable or virtually unable to walk because of a physical disability. This may apply to children who have physical problems with their legs or feet, or if they feel pain or discomfort after walking a short distance.

The DWP can pay the higher rate of the mobility component to children who are deafblind. They can also award it to children who are severely mentally impaired and have behavioural problems, although there is a strict legal definition of what this means.

### How to claim DLA

If you live in England or Wales, telephone the Disability Living Allowance Unit on **0800 121 4600** or textphone **0800 121 4523**. If you cannot hear or speak on the phone you can call **18001** then **0800 121 4600**, to use the Next Generation Text Service (NGTS).

You can also download or complete the claim forms at **gov.uk/disability-living-allowance-children/how-to-claim** but we still recommend calling the DWP as this fixes your date of claim.

If you live in Northern Ireland, call the Disability and Carers Service enquiry line on **0800 587 0912** or visit **nidirect.gov.uk** to download a claim form.

Providing the three-month qualifying period is met, if your child is awarded DLA, the payment will start from the date you made the call to request a pack, if you return the application form within six weeks. You can request a copy of the form in large print if this will help you.

Don’t be put off by the length of the form. If you need help completing the form, you could contact an experienced worker from an advice centre. Some local societies for blind and partially sighted people also offer help with completing benefit forms.

Give plenty of detail about your child’s problems and special needs on the form. Some people are turned down for benefits they should be entitled to because they don’t give enough information. Describe all the extra help that your child needs, emphasise the **extra** help and attention that they need, how **often** your child needs it and at **what times** throughout the day they need it.

Sometimes additional evidence can be helpful. For example, you may want to keep a diary for a few days, recording every occasion when your child needs extra help. Or you could include a letter from a teacher or classroom assistant describing the extra attention your child needs at school.

You can also use a statement of special educational needs to support your claim if your child has one.

### If your claim is turned down, do not give up

Sometimes the DWP makes the wrong decision, even if you have filled out your claim pack comprehensively. You can ask the DWP to look at their decision again if you wish to dispute it. This is called a **mandatory reconsideration** and must be requested within **one month** of the DWP’s initial decision, although late applications are possible in exceptional circumstances.

Supporting evidence, such as a letter or diary froma schoolteacher, a social worker or a specialist visual impairment teacher or physiotherapist can be helpful. You will need to send this to the DWP decision maker when you ask them for a reconsideration.

If, after the DWP have reconsidered their decision, you are still unhappy with the outcome and wish to dispute it, you can then lodge an appeal with HM Courts and Tribunals Service. For further information on the appeals process, please see our “Benefits appeals” factsheet which provides details of how to appeal across the UK.

### What happens to your child’s DLA at age 16?

When your child reaches age 16 you will have to claim Personal Independence Payment (PIP) for them, and once a decision is made about PIP their DLA will stop. The DWP will contact you as your child approaches their sixteenth birthday to give you notice of this.

When your child is:

* **15 years and 7 months**, the DWP will send a detailed letter to you (the child’s parent or guardian) explaining that your child will have to claim PIP at age 16 instead of DLA and that, until a decision has been made on their PIP claim, they will continue to receive DLA
* **15 years and 10 months**, the DWP will send you a letter reminding you that they will shortly invite your child to claim PIP
* **16 years old**, the DWP will send your child (or you, as their appointee) a letter inviting them to claim PIP. The letter should contain more detailed instructions about how to make the claim and when to do this. The DWP will also advise what happens if your child does not make a claim for PIP within the given period.

RNIB has a PIP factsheet and Toolkit to help you with making a claim for PIP for your child when they reach age 16. Please contact our Helpline to request a copy or download a copy of the Toolkit from our website: **rnib.org.uk/personal-independence-payment-toolkit**.

## DLA for children in hospital

If your child was under 18 when they became an in-patient in an NHS hospital, payments of their DLA or PIP continue as normal while they are during this time, and it doesn’t matter how long they are in hospital for.

You don’t have to show how much care you are continuing to provide to your child while they are in hospital or show what extra costs you are still incurring. Children aged under 18 are exempt from the rules restricting payments of DLA and PIP while in hospital.

If your child first claims DLA, or PIPif they are aged 16 to 17, while they are in hospital, payments can still start regardless of this.

When a child receiving DLA turns 16, they are normally invited to claim PIP. However, if your child is in hospital when they turn 16 their DLA payments should be temporarily extended, and they should not be invited to claim PIP until they have left hospital.

### DLA for children in residential accommodation

The care component of DLA (or the daily living component of PIP) cannot be paid after the first 28 days of a child’s stay in residential accommodation. This rule applies where any of the costs of the accommodation is being met from public or local authority funds. There are some exceptions to this rule so please seek advice if required.

Note that if you have a child who is in residential accommodation (for example at a school or college), they can still receive DLA or PIP for any nights spent away from the accommodation, such as during weekends or school holidays. During temporary absences the benefit can be paid from the day your child leaves the accommodation until and including the day they return e.g.,if they left on a Friday and returned on a Sunday the care component or daily living component would be paid for a three day period.

The mobility component of DLA or PIP can continue to be paid when a child stays in residential accommodation.

## Carer’s Allowance

If the DWP awards your child the DLA care component at the middle or highest rate, you or your partner may be able to claim Carer’s Allowance. It is worth **£76.75** per week.

Carer’s Allowance is **not** means-tested and does not depend on your National Insurance contributions. It is taxable.

To claim Carer's Allowance, you must satisfy the following conditions:

* you must be 16 or over
* you must spend at least 35 hours a week looking after a child who receives the middle or highest rate DLA care component, or PIP daily living component if they are 16 or over
* if you do any paid work, you must not earn more than £139a week after deductions for tax, national insuranceand certain expenses such as contributions to a pension or tocare costs
* you must not be in full time education. However, the meaning of “full time” is complicated and may depend on some factors including the type of course you are doing. If you are studying or thinking about studying, call our Helpline for advice.

**Please note:** If you already get Carer’s Allowance for looking after an adult or another child, you cannot get it for looking after another person. For a copy of our Carer’s Allowance factsheet please contact our Helpline.

For information about the carer element of Universal Credit, please see the relevant section below.

### How to claim Carer’s Allowance

If you live in England, Walesor Scotland, call the Carer’s Allowance Unit on **0800 731 0297** to request a claim form or go to **gov.uk/carers-allowance/how-to-claim** to complete an online application or to download and print an application form.

If you live in Northern Ireland visit **nidirect.gov.uk/services/apply-carers-allowance-online** or call the Disability and Carer’s Service on **0800 587 0912** or on textphone on **0800 012 1574.**

## Other benefits

You may be entitled to claim other benefits, either instead of, or in addition to, Carer’s Allowance.

You may be able to claim a benefit based on your National Insurance contributions, including **Jobseeker’s Allowance** (JSA) if you are able to look for work, or **Employment and Support Allowance** (ESA) if you have an illness or disability that limits your ability to work. Note, if you make a new claim for the contribution-based type of these benefits it may be called “new style” JSA and ESA. However, the contribution rules which areapplicable to these benefits have not changed.

If you are entitled to make a claim for a means-tested benefit it is likely that you will have to claim **Universal Credit**. However, please see the exception in the Universal Credit section below. If you already get one of the means-tested benefits, also referred to as legacy benefits, listed below you will remain on that benefit until you:

* either have a change in your circumstances that means you must claim Universal Credit, or
* you are contacted by DWP about transferring to Universal Credit as part of their managed migration process.

If you already get or can start claiming **Child Tax Credit** (CTC) you could get an increased amount of CTC called the disabled child element. You will qualify for this if either your child receives any rate of DLA, PIP or Armed Forces Independence Payment, or if they are certified as severely sight impaired or blind. There are very limited circumstances as to when you can make a new claim for CTC (as this is a legacy benefit and is being replaced by UC) and typically you would need to already be claiming **Working Tax Credit** (WTC).

If your child is entitled to the highest rate of the care component of DLA, the enhanced rate of the daily living element of PIP or Armed Forces Independence Payment, you will get the Severely Disabled Child element, rather than the Disabled Child element.

If you are at State Pension qualifying age you can claim a means-tested benefit called **Pension Credit**, depending on your income and capital and other circumstances. Note that in couples where one partner is over Pension Credit qualifying age, but the other partner is of working age, any **new** claim for means-tested benefits will usually have to be for Universal Credit). When the younger partner reaches State Pension qualifying age you will be able to claim Pension Credit instead of Universal Credit.

Whether you are of working age or pension age, you may also be entitled to claim a **Council Tax Reduction** to help with your council tax bill, if your income is low enough. Please contact your local authority about this.

When your child is in receipt of DLA**,** you will be paid a **Christmas Bonus** each year which is paid to your child. This is usually **£10**. You do not need to make a claim for the bonus, it is paid automatically, and it will not affect any other benefits you might get.

### Universal Credit

Universal Credit is a benefit that has replaced the following means-tested legacy benefits for people of working age:

* Income Support
* Income-based JSA
* Income-related ESA
* Housing Benefit
* Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit
* Budgeting loans and crisis loan alignment payments.

Universal Credit has a standard allowance for a single claimant or a couple. It also has a child element. Usually this can be paid for a maximum of two children but there are some exceptions to this two-child limit. Universal Credit can include an element to help pay your housing costs, such as rent.

Universal Credit can include a disabled child addition, which will be paid for each qualifying child. You will get the higher rate addition if your child is certified as severely sight impaired or blind, **or** if they are entitled to either DLA care component at the higher rate, or PIP daily living component at the enhanced rate. You will get the lower rate addition if your child receives any other award of DLA or PIP.

Universal Credit can also include a carer element. You can get this if you provide 35 hours a week of care for a child who receives the middle or highest rate DLA/CDP care component, or PIP/ADP daily living component if they are 16 or over. You do not have to have a claim for Carer’s Allowance for this to apply and, unlike Carer’s Allowance, there is no maximum earnings limit for the carer element.

If you make a new claim for a means-tested benefit or have a relevant change in your circumstances while claiming one of the legacy benefits, such as a partner joining the household, you will have to claim Universal Credit.

Some people will be worse off financially by claiming Universal Credit rather than legacy benefits. If you are unsure whether you should claim or are eligible to claim Universal Credit it would be a good idea to get advice from an experienced adviser before claiming.

For further information please call our Helpline or see our Universal Credit factsheet: **rnib.org.uk/universal-credit**.

### Health benefits

Children under 16 (or under 18 and in full-time non-advanced education) qualify for free prescriptions, dental treatment, eye tests and help with the cost of glasses. Please contact NHS Help with Health Costs on **0300 330 1343** for more information.

### Exemption from the benefits cap

There is a benefit cap for people of working age. This means that the total amount of income you can receive from state benefits may be capped at certain rates, according to your personal circumstances.

However, families and individuals in receipt of one or more specific benefits are exempt from the cap. This includes if you have a child who receives any award of DLA or PIP.

### TV licence discount

If your child is registered **severely sight impaired or blind**, you are entitled to a 50 per cent discount on the cost of a television licence. You will need to put the licence in your child’s name, but there is no age limit. You will need to show your child’s registration certificate when you renew your licence. For further information, call the TV Licensing Helpline on **0300 790 6071** or visit **tvlicensing.co.uk**.

### Support in school

You should ask your Local Education Authority (LEA) to draw up an education, health and care plan (EHC) to address your child’s special educational needs (SEN). The EHC gives details about the extra needs your child has and sets out what special arrangements are necessary to meet those needs.

After the LEA has carried out their assessment, they will send you a draft plan that you can challenge if you disagree with it.

## How we can help

If you would like more information about any of the benefits for children with sight loss, you can speak to our Advice service by calling our Helpline. Our advisors can also carry out a full benefit check with you and give you advice about applying for other benefits you may be missing out on.

Our Welfare Benefit Sight Loss Advisers are available to offer help if you would like to challenge a benefit decision or think you should be awarded more than you have been. Our advisers can help you with the mandatory reconsideration and First-Tier Tribunal (appeals) process.

RNIB’s Legal Rights service is available to offer you help with more complex benefit queries and appeals, such as those to the Upper Tribunal, once the initial appeals process to the First Tier Tribunal has been completed.

### RNIB Helpline

If you need someone who understands sight loss, call our Helpline on **0303 123 9999**, say **“Alexa, call RNIB Helpline”** to an Alexa-enabled device, or email **helpline@rnib.org.uk**. Our opening hours are weekdays from 8am – 8pm and Saturdays from 9am – 1pm.

### Sight Advice FAQ

Sight Advice FAQ answers questions about living with sight loss, eye health or being newly diagnosed with a sight condition. It is produced by RNIB in partnership with a number of other sight loss organisations. **sightadvicefaq.org.uk**

### Connect with others

Meet or connect with others who are blind or partially sighted online, by phone or in your community to share interests, experiences and support for each other. From book clubs and social groups to sport and volunteering, our friendly, helpful and knowledgeable team can link you up with opportunities to suit you.Visit **rnib.org.uk/connect** or call **0303 123 9999**.



**RNIB Legal Rights service**

April 2023

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