

Free early education for two year olds

Information for parents

What is the free early education offer for two year olds?

Free early education for two year olds is a funded scheme which entitles your child to access a place in a pre-school, nursery or with a childminder for 15 hours per week, 38 weeks per year.

From April 2013 you will be able to access a free place for your child if you are in receipt of one of the following:

- income support
- income-based jobseekers allowance
- income-related employment support allowance
- child tax credit, with a taxable income no more than £16,190 and not in receipt of working tax credit
- pension credit (guarantee credit)
- support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

The following groups of children can also access a free place:

- child looked after (CLA)
- child is subject to a special guardianship order (SGO)
- child is staying in a refuge (CIR)
- child is adopted.

Why use free early education for your two year old?

Benefits for your child

Research has shown that time spent in a high quality early years setting can:

- improve your child's development
- help to prepare them for school
- give them the opportunity to socialise with other children
- give them access to lots of new experiences, for example, playing with sand and water, or painting
- be lots of fun.

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Benefits for you

While your child is having fun at their pre-school, nursery or with their childminder, you have time to spend with your other children, the opportunity to go back to work or take up a college course.

Will my child be safe?

All free early education places are offered with providers who have been registered and checked by Ofsted. Ofsted are the organisation responsible for ensuring that childcare providers are safe and able to provide a quality experience for your child.

How do I apply for a place?

You can speak to your local childcare provider who can make an application for you. You could also go to your children's centre, health visitor or social worker (if you have one). Any of these people can make an application on your behalf.

What information do I need to provide?

The offer of a free place is dependant on you being on certain benefits as previously mentioned. You will need to give the person making the referral your name, date of birth and national insurance number. You will also need to give them your child's name, date of birth and NHS number.

Where can my child access their free place?

The free early education place can be at a pre-school, day nursery, nursery school or childminder. All settings and childminders who want to offer free places for two year olds have to meet specific quality criteria. This is so that we can be sure that your child is accessing a place in a high quality setting. The person making the referral for you will need to check that the setting you choose has space for your child.

When can my child take their free place?

The earliest a child can take their free place is the term after their second birthday.

The table below shows the dates of birth and the earliest time your child could take up their free place.

| A child born between: | Can be considered for a place from: |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 September and 31 December | January |
| 1 January and 31 March | April |
| 1 April and 31 August | September |

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What happens next?

After the application has been made, your details will be run through the national eligibility checker to confirm that your child is eligible for a free place. Hertfordshire County Council will contact the referrer to advise them of the outcome. They will then get in touch with you to advise when your child can start.

What happens when my child is three?

All children are eligible for a free early education place from the term after their third birthday. If your child accesses a free two year old place, they will automatically move into the funded three year old process. All early years providers will aim to make this transition as smooth as possible and your child may even stay at the same setting.