

Discover...

Free Entitlement

A guide for
parents and carers
by the Family
Information Service



west
sussex
county
council

[www.westsussex.gov.uk/
frechildcare](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/frechildcare)

Free Entitlement

What is Free Entitlement?

Free Entitlement (FE) is 570 hours per year of flexible free childcare available to eligible 2 year olds and all 3 and 4 year olds. Free places are available at eligible childminders, pre-schools or day nurseries, known as settings.

What are the benefits for my child?

The work of childhood is play. Children naturally learn by playing, exploring their world, being creative and finding things out. The activities you do at home with your child are key to helping them develop.

In addition, research* has shown that children who also attend a high quality childcare setting enhance their all-round development and are predicted better grades as they progress through school. The longer they attend (in months and years) the greater the advantage they have.

Parents often say their children benefit by:

- having fun, improving social skills and making new friends
- experiencing new activities and learning new things
- building their confidence and independence
- encouraging their imagination and creativity
- developing skills that help them with writing later on
- learning to share and listen
- being ready for school

A high quality setting provides a wide range of opportunities for your child to learn as they play.

Is my child eligible?

FE is for all 3 and 4 year old children attending an eligible childcare setting in West Sussex regardless of disability, additional needs or citizenship.

In addition, some 2 year olds can access funding if the family meet certain eligibility criteria. To check the 2 year old eligibility criteria and find out how to apply, please visit our website, or contact us.



*Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education [EPPSE] (www.dfes.gov.uk/research).

Use the table below to check when your child is of eligible age to access FE.

Determining Eligibility for the Free Entitlement	
A child born between:	Will be eligible for the Free Entitlement from:
1 April and 31 August	1 September following their 3rd birthday (or 2nd birthday if eligible) until statutory school age
1 September and 31 December	1 January following their 3rd birthday (or 2nd birthday if eligible) until statutory school age
1 January and 31 March	1 April following their 3rd birthday (or 2nd birthday if eligible) until statutory school age

Research shows that most families would always be better off claiming FE than paying for childcare using Tax Credits. If you are eligible for the Childcare Element of Working Tax Credit you should contact Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs on 0845 300 3900 or online at www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits to check if your claim is affected.

How do I find a place?

Once you know your child is eligible and/or 2 year old funding has been awarded, contact us to find details of local settings that offer FE places.

The types of settings that may offer FE places must be eligible and registered with the West Sussex County Council scheme* and include:

- a childminder
- a day nursery, nursery class/school, pre-school or playgroup
- an independent school

Next, arrange to visit some settings to choose your preferred one. Please refer to our Discover...Childcare leaflet for suggestions to help you find the best type of childcare for your child.

Accept a place, if available, and agree the terms and conditions. Please note that not all settings may be able to deliver your preferred days/hours, but this may be achieved by using more than one setting, but no more than two.

*refer to West Sussex County Council's Provider Declaration at www.westsussex.gov.uk/ecsfreetitlement

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In order for your chosen setting to claim the funding for your child's place, you will be asked to sign a Parent Declaration form and show proof of date of birth for your child. You must let the setting know if you intend to split the FE across two settings.

Is it really free?

The 570 hours per year is free. It does not have a monetary value and is not a voucher or parental subsidy. Therefore, settings must not simply deduct the amount of funding they receive from your invoice (top-ups).

If you are planning to only access your child's free hours, settings must ensure that no fees or conditions of access are charged, including:

- registration/administration fees, payment up front or refundable or non-refundable deposits;
- no requirement for a child to access additional hours on top of the free hours;
- no requirement for the child to access additional weeks on top of the funded weeks;
- compulsory payments for a lunch provided by the provider;
- anything additional such as materials, snacks or drinks.

Childcare settings can set their own rates for additional hours or services but they should let you know, in advance, if you will be expected to pay anything. Details should be included within the setting's admissions/pricing policy. For example, if you're accessing more than just the free hours you may be charged for meals. However, if you are only accessing free hours you should have the option to provide a packed lunch instead.

Any voluntary contributions asked for do not have to be paid.



What else do I need to know?

Think of the entitlement as 570 hours per year and this cannot be exceeded. These hours can be stretched (see table below) across the whole year dependent on your chosen setting's availability and method of claiming. For example, not all settings will be able to stretch the FE over more than 38 weeks as they are open term-time only.

Weeks per year	Hours per week	Total hours across the year
36	15	540*
37	15	555*
38	15	570
45	12.5	562.5**
51	11	561**

* If a setting is open for less than 38 weeks per year, the remaining hours cannot be claimed at another setting.

**The remainder of hours cannot be claimed as FE can only be claimed in half hour blocks.

If your child will be attending a setting that is open more than 38 weeks per year you should discuss with them their method of claiming, so you are aware of any potential loss in free hours.

If a setting has any planned closures during FE time (for example, due to holiday, In-Service Training (INSET) days, or bank holidays) then your FE hours should be made available at another time.

The amount of FE hours that can be taken in a day will depend on the admissions policy of your chosen setting. However, the setting is required to work within the following national guidelines:

- Minimum of 2.5 hours in one day
- Maximum of 10 hours in one day
- Between the hours of 7am and 7pm
- 15 hours over a minimum of 2 days

As a parent, you know your child best and should discuss your child's needs with the setting to help you decide how often your child should attend. A regular pattern of attendance is important to ensure your child's continued development. Therefore, a consistent pattern is suggested such as:

- Every morning
- Every afternoon
- 2.5 days per week which are the same days each week

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It can be hard to balance your own needs, especially for working parents, with those of your child. However, you should aim to use your chosen setting for as long as possible, avoiding the need to move your child every few months or term.

Legally all children must start full-time education (usually in school) no later than the term after they become 5. Whenever your child starts in a school Reception Class, whether on a full or part-time basis, they can no longer receive funding for free childcare. For further information about applying for a school place please visit

www.westsussex.gov.uk/admissions.

What questions should I ask about FE when visiting settings?

What and when is Headcount Day?

It is important to know when Headcount Day is as your child may need to be in attendance by this date to access the free hours that term. Headcount days are usually in January, April and September and are when the setting confirms all FE children attending to us. All children claiming FE during that term should be registered at the setting by the Headcount Day. If your child starts after this date, FE cannot be claimed for 3 and 4 year olds until the following term (unless in exceptional circumstances). 2 year olds are able to start at any point during a term.

How long is your notice period if I wish to move my child?

These should be laid out in the setting's Admissions Policy. It is important you adhere to their notice periods to avoid any additional or unexpected charges. If you have adhered to their notice period then the setting will forward any unused funding to your new setting within West Sussex.

Can I see your setting's policies? (including: admissions, behaviour management/social development, equal opportunities, safeguarding, sickness, insurance cover, registration certificate etc.)

The admissions policy is particularly important as it should show clearly how they offer the FE and any potential obligations, financial or otherwise, over and above the FE. You should understand all the policies of a setting before agreeing to the terms and conditions and signing a contract. If you have any queries regarding the policy, discuss this with the setting **before** signing a contract. For further help and support contact us.

Can I see a sample invoice so that I can understand your charges?

Settings should be able to show you a sample invoice and explain how charges are calculated and displayed. However, the invoice should never show your free hours as a monetary value. Having discussed your query with the setting if you are still unclear contact us for further assistance.

Can I increase FE hours part way through a term once my child has settled?

Talk to the setting about the best approach to settling in your child. If you choose not to take the full entitlement each week then you will only be able to increase this at the beginning of the following term. Settings should offer a settling in period at the beginning of your child's attendance.

Does the FE hours include lunch time?

If the FE hours does include lunch time then the setting can charge you for the actual meal, not the time. However, if you are only accessing free hours you should have the option to provide a packed lunch instead. You can discuss with them any specific food policies the setting may have.

Where can I go for extra help and support?

Please see the back page of this leaflet for the range of ways which you can contact us.



Contact Us

You can contact the Family Information Service for further information and guidance about your family's needs.



Internet

www.westsussex.gov.uk/freechildcare



Post

West Sussex Family Information Service
Early Childhood Service
St James Campus, St James Road, Chichester,
West Sussex, PO19 7HA



Telephone

01243 777807



Email

family.info.service@westsussex.gov.uk

Opening hours

Monday – Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm

If you have any difficulties or feedback regarding this leaflet please call the Family Information Service on 01243 777807.

We are able to supply you with a copy of this leaflet in a version most appropriate to your needs, for example audio, braille, large print or in another language.



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