

Financial help for young parents



January 2018

Child Poverty Action Group works on behalf of the one in four children in Scotland growing up in poverty. It doesn't have to be like this. We use our understanding of what causes poverty and the impact it has on children's lives to campaign for policies that will prevent and solve poverty – for good.

We provide training, advice and information to make sure hard-up families get the financial support they need.

Introduction - key messages for young parents

- You don't have to give up education or training
- You don't have to give up work
- Don't miss out on help
- If you live with your parents, you could have a choice whether they claim for you, or you claim for yourself – and the amount may be different
- If you live on your own, you claim benefits as a lone parent
- If a partner lives with you (wife, husband, boyfriend or girlfriend – it does not matter whether s/he is your baby's parent), and you're both aged at least 16, you count as a couple and most benefits depend on your joint income.

Babies are expensive. Having enough money is vitally important for you and your baby's health and wellbeing. As well as the basics like food, nappies and clothing, it really helps your child's development if you can buy toys and books and be able to afford to take them on outings. The government makes payments to parents to help them because it is in everyone's interest to bring up children who are safe, healthy and able to achieve their potential. Being a parent is a difficult and important (but unpaid) job, and everyone needs support. You also need the opportunity to look after yourself and continue to develop your own education or career for the future.

[If you are aged under 16](#)

[If you are aged 16 or over](#)

[If you are part of a couple](#)

[Housing](#)

[Education and training](#)

[Work](#)

[Early education and childcare](#)

[Glossary & Links](#)

What benefit you can apply for depends on whether you are living in an area where universal credit has been fully introduced – see www.cpag.org.uk/content/are-you-ready-universal-credit

If you are aged under 16

Healthy Start Vouchers and free vitamins

You can get Healthy Start Vouchers and free vitamins from 10 weeks pregnant until your child is aged four. All pregnant women in Scotland can get free vitamins. The vouchers are £3.10 a week to spend on milk, fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables – you get an extra voucher in your baby's first year. As long as you are under 18 and pregnant, it does not matter what benefits or other income you or anyone else in your family is getting. When your child is born, you may still qualify but it depends on other benefits.

Child benefit

You can claim child benefit for your baby. Alternatively, someone else in your family could claim child benefit for your baby. This would usually be your parent, or the person who claims child benefit for you. If you claim child benefit, you receive about £7 a week more. Claim within 3 months of the birth or you will lose money.

Maternity allowance

It does not matter how old you are for this benefit, but you must have been working for at least 26 weeks in the 66 weeks before your baby is due. It does not have to be 26 weeks in a row. This could include a holiday, evening or weekend job, as long as you were earning at least £30 a week in any 13 of those weeks. (If you were earning enough, you could even be entitled to Statutory Maternity Pay from your employer instead – see [Work](#)).

Sure Start Maternity Grant

If someone in your family gets child tax credit for you, they can claim a Sure Start Maternity Grant of £500 to help with the costs of the new-born baby. It does not matter if there are other under 16s in the household; as long as this is your first baby, a grant is payable. Claim within three months of the birth.

Other benefits

You cannot claim any other benefits for yourself or for your baby until you are aged at least 16. When you turn 16, you have a choice to start claiming some benefits in your own right instead – see next section.

Your parents or someone you live with may already be claiming child benefit and child tax credit for you. They can also claim child benefit and child tax credit for your baby. Even if you claim the child benefit for your baby, they can still claim child tax credit – they do not have to be claimed together, but it might take a bit longer for child tax credit to be sorted out.

If your parent is not working and does not have a partner, s/he can claim income support as a lone parent with responsibility for you and your baby, even if you get the child benefit. This means your parent does not have to sign on and claim jobseeker's allowance; s/he can claim income support and does not need to be looking for work, so can support you with your baby.

Kinship care

This is when you are unable to live with your own parents, and the social work department has looked after you and placed you with another relative to live with. In this situation, financial help depends on the care arrangements for you and your baby – for more information, see CPAG in Scotland's leaflet, '[Kinship care and benefits - the essentials](#)'

If you are aged 16 or over

Healthy Start Vouchers and free vitamins

You can get Healthy Start Vouchers and free vitamins from 10 weeks pregnant until your child is aged four. All pregnant women in Scotland can get free vitamins. The vouchers are £3.10 a week to spend on milk, fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables – you get an extra voucher in your baby's first year. As long as you are under 18 and pregnant, it does not matter what benefits or other income you or anyone else in your family is getting.

When your child is born or you turn 18 (whichever is first), you may still qualify but it depends on other benefits. You, or the person who claims for you, is entitled to Healthy Start vouchers if getting:

- income support
- income-based jobseeker's allowance
- income-related employment and support allowance (during pregnancy)
- child tax credit (income below £16,190 and not entitled to working tax credit)
- universal credit (monthly earnings no more than £408)

If you were getting Healthy Start vouchers while pregnant, they can continue for up to four months after the due date if you have not notified the Healthy Start Scheme that your baby has been born. As long as you tell Healthy Start within four months of the birth, you can get an extra voucher from the date of birth.

Sure Start Maternity Grant

You can claim a Sure Start Maternity Grant of £500 if you get certain benefits for yourself, or you get child tax credit for your baby. The qualifying benefits are income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, income-related employment and support allowance or universal credit. Alternatively someone else in your family could claim it if they get benefits for you or your baby. It does not matter if there are other under 16s in the household; as long as this is your first baby, a grant is payable. Claim within three months of the birth. Do not delay if you are waiting to hear about child tax credit or other qualifying benefits – make the claim for the Sure Start Maternity Grant, keep the letter you get about it safe, and then contact the number on the letter when you hear about the child tax credit or other benefit.

Child benefit

You can claim child benefit for your baby. Alternatively, someone else in your family could claim child benefit for your baby. This would usually be your parent, or the person who claims child benefit for you if you are still in full-time education or training (payment can continue for up to 6 months during a temporary interruption to education/training). If you claim child benefit, you receive about £7 a week more. Claim within three months of the birth or you will lose money.

Child tax credit

In areas where universal credit has not yet been fully introduced, you can claim child tax credit for your baby if you are aged at least 16. It does not matter whether you have ever worked or paid tax. Alternatively, someone else who lives with you could claim child tax credit for your baby. This would usually be your parent, or the person who claims child tax credit for you if you are still in full-time education or training (payment can continue for up to 6 months during a temporary interruption to education/training). If you start claiming child tax credit for your baby, this means that your parent cannot get child tax credit for you anymore, so you may also have to claim another benefit for yourself. There are a lot of things to consider before deciding which option is better, so get advice. Whoever claims, child tax credit should be claimed within 31 days of the birth, or you will lose money. Do not wait for child benefit before claiming child tax credit.

Universal credit

This is a new benefit that is gradually being introduced to replace income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, income-related employment and support allowance, housing benefit and tax credits. If you live in an area where universal credit has been fully introduced, you will have to claim universal credit instead. If you are aged 16 or 17, you can claim from 11 weeks before your baby is due, or earlier if you are without parental support or you have a medical certificate saying you are not fit for work. But if you are still in full-time education, you cannot usually claim UC until your baby is born, unless you are without parental support, or have been assessed as having limited capability for work. Being without parental support means that you have no parent, or you cannot live with your parents because you are estranged from them, or there is a risk of harm, or they cannot support you due to disability, imprisonment or are not allowed to enter Britain. When your baby is born, notify the birth as soon as possible, so that you will receive an extra amount of universal credit for your baby.

Work-related requirements

Universal credit has rules about what you are expected to do to prepare for or look for work. These must be set out in your claimant commitment. If you do not meet these requirements without a good reason, you may be sanctioned. Your requirements change as follows:

- First 29 weeks of pregnancy: you will usually still be expected to look for work, unless you have a health condition or illness. You can agree limits on the type of work or hours you can do.
- From 11 weeks before your baby is due until 15 weeks after the birth, and while you are the responsible carer of a child under one: you have no work-related requirements and cannot be sanctioned (although an earlier sanction may continue, but at a reduced rate).
- When your child is aged at least one, you must attend work-focused interviews.
- When your child is aged 2, you must prepare for work.
- When your child is aged 3, you must look for work.

Two child limit

There is a two child limit in child tax credit and universal credit which can mean no extra money is payable for some babies born on or after 6 April 2017 if there are already two or more other children. However, this limit does not apply to your baby if you are still part of someone else's claim, up to age 20 for CTC or up to age 16 for UC. Once you start claiming CTC or UC in your own name, it does not matter if there are other children at the same address (such as a younger sibling) but you can only claim for two children of your own (there are limited exceptions, such as multiple births).

Income Support

In areas where universal credit has not yet been fully introduced, if you have a child and are under 20 and still at school or college (full-time non-advanced education) you may be able to claim income support – including if you have a partner, depending on what s/he is doing and on his/her income. If you are lone parent with a child under 5, you can get income support for yourself. This means you do not have to apply for jobs, but you may be asked to attend work-focused interviews if your child is aged at least one, and prepare for work if your child is aged 3 or 4. You should not be sanctioned while you are under 18 and responsible for a child.

Scottish Welfare Fund

If you are in a crisis for any reason, you can apply to your local council for a grant for living expenses for a short time. You might also be able to get a grant if you are moving into a new home and need basic items.

If you are part of a couple

If you live with your partner, you have to claim some benefits together, and entitlement depends on your joint income and what you are both doing. Partner means someone you live with and are in a relationship with, as though you are married. It does not matter whether you are married or not, or whether your partner is your baby's parent or not, and it includes same-sex couples. If you, or your partner, are under 16, you cannot count as part of a couple for benefit purposes. Your partner cannot claim child benefit or child tax credit as the person responsible for you.

Child benefit

You should usually still claim in your own name.

Child tax credit and working tax credit

You must make a joint claim as a couple. Child tax credit should still be paid to the main carer for the child. You may also be able to get working tax credit if you, or your partner, are working. As a couple, you must usually be working at least 24 hours a week to qualify for working tax credit. If either one of you is working 24 hours or more, you can qualify. If you both work, you can add your hours together to reach at least 24, as long as one of you is working at least 16 hours a week. If one of you works at least 16 hours a week and the other is sick, disabled, a carer for a disabled person, or in hospital or prison, you can qualify. If you are a lone parent working at least 16 hours a week, or a couple both working at least 16 hours a week, (or one of you is working at least 16 hours and the other is sick, disabled, a carer for a disabled person, or in hospital or prison), you can qualify for help with childcare costs in working tax credit.

Income Support, income-based jobseeker's allowance and income-related employment and support allowance

You cannot get any of these benefits if your partner is working 24 hours or more a week. Otherwise, there may be a choice of benefits and you should get advice to decide which is the best option.

If you have a child and are under 20 and still at school or college (full-time non-advanced education, i.e. below university degree level) you can get income support – including if you have a partner.

If you have left school or college, it is likely that you will be added to your partner's income-based jobseeker's allowance claim. The amount should go up to the couple rate. Even though it may be called a joint claim, you do not have to look for work if you are responsible for a child.

If one of you is sick or disabled, you may be able to get income-related employment and support allowance

Universal credit

In areas of Scotland where universal credit has been fully introduced, you may have to claim UC instead of the benefits and tax credits mentioned above. You can qualify for UC whether or not you or your partner are in work, but the amount depends on your joint income. As a couple, you nominate who is the main carer of the child, and that person does not have to apply for jobs, but must attend work-focused interviews when your child is aged at least one, prepare for work when your child is aged 2 and look for work when your child is aged 3. If you become part of a couple with someone who gets universal credit, it becomes a joint claim as a couple. Your entitlement to income support, child tax credit and working tax credit will end. You can still get universal credit if you are in work, and it can include help with the costs of childcare for any hours of work.

Housing

If you live with your parents, or another relative

You cannot usually get any help to pay for where you live. It's between you and the person you live with whether you agree to pay something to help with bills, etc. If you are 18 or over and working, the person you live with may get less help with their rent because you are living there.

If you live on your own, or with your partner

If you need somewhere to live, contact your local council housing department. If you have to pay rent for where you live, you can get help from housing benefit. This is if your landlord is a housing association, local council, letting agency or a private individual. This does not always cover your rent in full, especially if you have a spare bedroom, but you can also apply to the council for a discretionary housing payment.

If you or your partner own your home and have a mortgage, some help is also available if you get income support/income-based jobseeker's allowance or income-related employment and support allowance. These benefits can include payments that help pay the interest on a mortgage. Mortgage payments go straight to the lender, usually a bank or building society, and so reduce the amount you have to pay them.

If you are 18 or over, you may be liable for council tax. You can get help to pay your council tax bill by applying for a council tax reduction from your local council. You can also apply for an exemption if you are a full-time student.

If you get universal credit, this can also include payments for rent or a mortgage.

In some cases, housing benefit or universal credit payments for rent may go into your bank account, so you are responsible for making the payment to your landlord. If this causes you problems, you can ask for the payment to be made straight to your landlord. But this may still leave some rent that you have to pay yourself.

If you are moving into a new home and need basic household items, you might be able to get a Scottish Welfare Fund grant from your local council.

Education and training

If you are still at school or college, you do not have to give up your education because you are pregnant. You are allowed to take a break from your course and go back when you are able to. Any benefits that you claim, or a member of your family claims for you, can usually continue during a temporary interruption to your education. You may be able to get an Education Maintenance Allowance if you are over school-leaving age and are staying on in non-advanced education (school or college). If you have left education and want to get back to college or training, talk to [Skills Development Scotland](#). Colleges can also provide grants to pay for childcare costs while you are studying.

While you are still in full-time non-advanced education, someone else who you live with (usually your parent) may be able to claim child benefit and child tax credit or universal credit for you and for your baby, or you have the option to claim these benefits for yourself and your baby. Someone else can continue to claim for you while you are in full-time non-advanced education and you are under 20 for child benefit and child tax credit, or up to the 31st August after your 19th birthday for universal credit. You should get specialist advice to work out whether you will be better off, as it depends on family income and circumstances. You might also want to talk to someone about the implications of being responsible for your own money, or relying on someone else.

Work

If you have a job, you do not have to give it up just because you are pregnant. It is against the law for an employer to sack you just because you are pregnant, or to pressure you into giving up your job. Your employer has a duty to make changes to your job if there are some things you cannot do for health and safety reasons. You have the right to paid time off for antenatal appointments. You have the right to take up to one year's maternity leave and to return to work. You must take at least 2 weeks off when you have the baby, or 4 weeks if you work in a factory. If you have been working for long enough and earning enough, you may be entitled to statutory maternity pay or maternity allowance.

Statutory Maternity Pay

If you were employed for at least 26 weeks with the same employer and earning at least £113 a week for 8 weeks, you could be entitled to Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) from your employer. It is against the law for an employer to sack you simply because you are pregnant, or to avoid paying SMP. You also have the right to return to work after maternity leave of up to one year. SMP is payable for 39 weeks. You are still entitled to SMP if your job has ended or you do not intend to go back to work. If you have a partner and you both work, you may be entitled to Shared Parental Leave and Pay, which allows you both to share the time off work to look after the baby.

Maternity Allowance

You might be able to get maternity allowance if you are not entitled to SMP but you have been working for at least 26 weeks in the 66 weeks before your baby is due. It does not have to be 26 weeks in a row. This could include a holiday, evening or weekend job, as long as you were earning at least £30 a week in any 13 of those weeks. MA is payable for 39 weeks. Even if you only receive a small amount of maternity allowance, it can be topped up by other benefits.

Working tax credit or universal credit

If you were working for at least 16 hours a week before going on maternity leave, or before getting maternity allowance, you could get working tax credit for up to 39 weeks, and when you go back to work. Working tax credit can also include help with childcare costs. If you get universal credit, there are no hours rules, but the amount can change according to your earnings and you can get help with childcare costs for any hours worked. See also [‘If you are part of a couple’](#).

Early education and childcare

Pre-school is vitally important for your child's development, and gives them an opportunity to learn new skills and mix with other children. It also gives you time to continue your education, training or to start work. If you are in education, your school or college may provide a nursery or a grant to pay for the costs of childcare. If you are in work, you can get help from working tax credit or universal credit to pay for childcare costs. The Scottish Government provides a free childcare place of 600 hours a year (around 16 hours a week in term-time) for children:

- From the start of the next term after your child's 2nd birthday, if you are getting income support, income based jobseekers allowance, income related employment and support allowance, child tax credit with an income less than £16,105 or working tax credit with an income less than £6,420;
- From the start of the next term after your child's 3rd birthday, in all other cases.

For younger children, you may be able to take your child to a parent and toddler group – there may be a charge for these, or a baby story or singing group at a local library – these may be free.

People from abroad

If you are a national of another European Economic Area (EEA) country, your right to claim some benefits may be limited, depending on your circumstances. If you have come to the UK from outside the EEA, you might not have the right to claim benefits (public funds), depending on your immigration status. Seek specialist advice in either situation.

Glossary & Links

Appeal: the second stage in challenging a benefit or tax credits decision if you disagree with it (after a mandatory reconsideration), when you can get a fair hearing from an independent tribunal.

[Child benefit:](#) payment if you are responsible for a child – not affected by other income (unless you, or your partner, are earning over £50,000 a year)

[Child tax credit \(CTC\)](#) : payment if you are responsible for a child living with you – depends on other income

[Department for Work & Pensions \(DWP\)](#): the part of the UK government that deals with most benefits.

[Education Maintenance Allowance \(EMA\)](#): payment for young people in non-advanced education in Scotland.

[Employment and support allowance \(ESA\)](#): payment if you are unable to work due to illness or disability, and for limited times due to pregnancy and childbirth. Income-related ESA depends on other income. The contributory version depends on National Insurance contributions paid when in work.

[Expected week of childbirth \(EWC\)](#): the week, beginning on the Sunday, in which it is expected your baby will be born.

[Healthy Start Scheme:](#) free vouchers to spend on milk, fresh and frozen fruit and vegetables, and infant formula milk, and free vitamins for pregnant women or families with a child under 4. Free vitamins for all pregnant women in Scotland.

[Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs \(HMRC\)](#): the part of the UK government that deals with tax credits and child benefit.

[Housing benefit:](#) help from your local council to pay your rent – if it does not cover your rent in full, you can also apply for a *Discretionary Housing Payment*.

[Income support:](#) payment if you do not have to look for work, e.g. because you are the lone parent of a child under 5.

[Jobseeker's allowance \(JSA\)](#): payment if you have to sign on and look for work. Income-based JSA depends on other income. The contributory version depends on National Insurance contributions paid when in work.

[Mandatory reconsideration:](#) the first stage in challenging a decision about your benefits or tax credits.

[Maternity allowance:](#) payment if you have worked recently but do not qualify for SMP.

[Sanction:](#) stopping your benefit payments if the DWP thinks you have not done what is required, for example not attending an appointment without a good reason.

[Scottish Welfare Fund:](#) crisis grants for living expenses and community care grants in other circumstances, depending on need. Contact your local council.

[Statutory maternity pay \(SMP\)](#): wages from your employer while you are on maternity leave if you have worked for long enough and earned enough to qualify.

[Sure Start maternity grant:](#) one-off payment of £500 to help with maternity expenses and costs for a new-born baby.

[Universal credit \(UC\)](#): new benefit being gradually introduced in Scotland, replaces income support, income-based JSA, income-related ESA, housing benefit and tax credits.

[Working tax credit:](#) payment if you are in work, depending on income.

Further information

[Young Parent's Survival Guide](#) covers all aspects of pregnancy and maternity for young parents, published by NHS Health Scotland and One Parent Families Scotland.

[Ready Steady Baby](#) is a comprehensive guide for all mums, dads, partners, civil partners and other primary care givers who all have a very important role to play in the care and upbringing of your baby. Also available as a mobile app from NHS Health Scotland.

[Young Scot](#) is the national youth information and citizenship charity, providing young people, aged 11 - 26, with a mixture of information, ideas and incentives to help them become confident, informed and active citizens. A free and confidential phone service has information on a range of topics including money, health and the arts:

YoungScot InfoLine 0808 801 0338 (Monday to Friday 10am - 6pm)

Or email: infoline@youngscot.org

[One Parent Families Scotland](#) has friendly rights workers who are available who deal with more complicated problems like relationship break-down, contact arrangements for your children, getting to grips with child maintenance payments, helping you sort out what money you should be getting, returning to college or university and going back to work

Lone Parent Helpline 0808 801 0323 (Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.00pm)

or e-mail: helpline@opfs.org.uk

Financial help for young parents is one of a series of Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland leaflets giving guidance to advisers and those working with families in Scotland about aspects of the social security system of particular concern.

Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland

0141 552 0552 advice line for advisers on benefits and tax credits,

Monday to Thursday 10am to 4pm, Friday 10am to 12 noon

Email: advice@cpagscotland.org.uk

email advice for advisers on benefits and tax credits

CPAG in Scotland's advice line is only for advisers. If you are having problems with your own tax credit or benefit claim and need advice you should contact your citizens advice bureau or other local welfare rights service.

Website: www.cpag.org.uk/scotland/taxcredits

CPAG publishes the *Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits Handbook*, a comprehensive guide to benefits and tax credits for claimants and advisers.

© Child Poverty Action Group, January 2018

Child Poverty Action Group is a charity registered in England and Wales (registration number 294841) and in Scotland (registration number SC039339). Company limited by guarantee registered in England (registration number 1993854). Registered office: 30 Micawber Street, London N1 7TB

CPAG in Scotland's Tax Credits & Early Years Project is funded by the Scottish Government.