**How to find childcare and get help with childcare costs**

1. **At what age children can start nursery**?

Some **two-year-olds** can get up to 600 or 1,140 hours per year of early learning and childcare in council-run and partner-provider nurseries. These are called Terrific 2-year-olds or Eligible 2.

Criteria:

Receiving Universal Credit, living with a parent-appointed guardian, in temporary accommodation/homeless and more.

Child can start council nursery one week after second birthday -<https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/nurseries-childcare/nursery-places-two-year-olds>

Early learning and childcare for **three and four year olds**:

Every child in Scotland after their 3rd birthday is entitled to full number of hours (1140 hours) in full year or term time placement in either a local authority or partner provider setting.

Children can use these funded hours in different ways. For example:

* term time in line with school hours
* morning or afternoon sessions,
* ten-hour day sessions

1. **When to apply for the nursery?**

It is good to apply for a nursery place a year before 3rd birthday (or second birthday if we’re sure the family meets criteria for Eligible 2).

Children can start nursery in the end of the August or beginning of January – this depends on their birthday and availability at the nursery.

If the child was born in May – they can start the nursery in August.

If the child was born in September – they can start the nursery in January (more information in a link above).

To apply for the private nursery, it is never too early. When parent plans to return to work just after maternity/paternity leave it is good to apply for the nursery even when the child wasn’t born yet. Unfortunately, private nurseries in Edinburgh has very long waiting list.

Some nurseries have available "immediate start" and in such a situation it is good to check the quality and grades of the nursery on the website of the Care Inspectorate. It’s not always, but unfortunately quite common for nurseries that are able to start immediately to have low quality services.

1. **Applying for the nursery.**

Application form can be submitted only **to the first choice** setting. Families cannot submit more than 1 application form.

Application form can be downloaded online and send by e-mail to the first choice nursery, or taken in person a paper version from the nursery, filled up at home and brought back to the first choice nursery.

Parents in Edinburgh can choose 3 nurseries in their application form. There is no need to contact second and third nurseries unless family wants to see the place and meet their staff.

To complete application form parent need to agree the day to drop off following documents:

* Child’s birth certificate
* Proof of address – utility bill, council Tax letter

To apply at a partner-provider nursery or a childminder, parents must contact them directly. Usually, private nurseries have their own application form and booking system. Very often there is a waiting list and sometimes a registration fee.

1. **How to choose childcare?**

Childcare options:

**Council nursery, Early Ears Centers:** these can be found online by clicking on [Search for a nursery in your area](https://apps.esriuk.com/app/MyNearest/29/view/64e4ec854c3d4144a491fbf3cd2c6140/index.html) (currently the website doesn’t work). Parent needs to type in their post code and then choose the right address. It will appear a list of nurseries starting with the closest home.

Parents can choose a **private nursery** for babies just a few weeks old but will need to pay full costs, unless parent works and receives Universal Credit (more details on financial support for childcare will be described later).

Private nurseries can also work in partnership with Edinburgh Council and can offer 1140 hours for Eligible 2, 3- and 4-year-olds. It is possible to combine free 1140 hours and pay for extra used days (also Universal Credit can help with childcare costs) in a private setting.

Private nurseries are more flexible than council ones. Usually opening time is around 8am – 6pm, these settings don’t follow school pattern and children can use their service all year round (usually private nurseries are closed for Christmas and New Year’s Day only).

To choose a private nursery is good to use Care Inspectorate website: <https://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/care-services>

The search can be done for any location across Scotland. Parents can choose a distance from their home address and type in their post code and then choose the right option to find childcare, for example *day care for children*.

Care Inspectorate shows quality of childcare provider, received grades, annual report, full name and nursery’s address, phone number, e-mail address – all necessary details.

**Childminders** – registered childcare providers that are flexible, live locally, provide drop offs and pick ups from local nurseries/schools. Childminders provide their service in their own homes and usually can look after few children at the same time. Childminder is one of the cheapest options for childcare – the average rate per hour in Edinburgh is between £5.5 – £6.5.

They can only work certain number of hours – usually no longer than till 6.30 pm.

It is not easy to find a childminder who has available place ,after children started new term at the nursery or primary school. In Edinburgh is a limited number of childminders. It is good to ask for availability before summer – May/June.

To find a childminder is the best to use Care Inspectorate website and search for childminder in parents’ location, nursery or school location. The other option to find childminder is to use Scottish Childminding Association website: <https://www.childminding.org/specialist-services/choose-a-childminder>

**Nanny/Babysitter** – their services are not registered and must be paid in full.

There are limit of available options, If parent needs a childcare during weekends or evenings.

There are registered childcare agencies in Edinburgh which are expensive but if a parent receives Universal Credit, they can claim up to 85% of childcare costs back. This is good for ad hoc event or unexpected extra shifts at work.

**Breakfast Club** – this is a registered service usually run by primary schools and sometimes by an external company. To find a Breakfast Club parents can ask the school’s administrator or e-mail the school. Breakfast clubs are relatively cheap and sometimes free. They are usually open at 7.30/7.45 till classes start 8.45/9.00 Monday to Friday. Children have provided a choice of cereal, toasts, fruit etc.

To apply for a Breakfast Club parent need to take a form from the administrator or ask for e-mail to the breakfast club provider. It is good to apply for a space at the same time as parent apply for a place at the school, or anytime during a year.

**After School Club** – it is a registered service, usually run by an external company at the primary school. Not every school provides After School Club. In this situation it is worth to ask other local school if they provide their service for children from other primaries. For example, Granton Primary School doesn’t have ASC but children can use ASC provided by Forthview Primary School. Children are picked up by mini bus from Granton Primary School and taken to the Forthview. Parents must collect children from the Forthview Primary School.

After School Clubs are open usually till 6pm. Prices vary with different providers. Sometimes this is around £5/h, sometimes between £8 - £15 per day. Parents can claim up to 85% of these costs back from UC.

After School Clubs usually offer their service during school breaks – October, Christmas, February etc.

It is good to apply for ASC at the same time as parents apply for a place at the school – that means when child is still at the nursery.

**Summer Club** – registered childcare provider that offers its service during summer holiday. Often summer clubs are run at school but sometimes in other places. Children have provided activities and outings. Parents can choose morning, afternoon sessions or full day. Summer clubs are expensive – usually around £40 a day.

Not every school provides a Summer Club. To find a local club it is good to ask After School Club first, then school administration/teacher or check online.

1. **Quality of childcare.**

To check the quality of the childcare provider's services, parent can visit Care Inspectorate website. Type in the name of the setting and will see details about the childcare service. Usually, full reports are available to download and it is easy to check how services were graded (from 1- unsatisfactory to 6- excellence). The full report includes all the assessed details and key questions that the Care Inspectorate inspected.

Here is a 6-point scale to describe the quality:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 6 | Excellent | Outstanding or sector leading |
| 5 | Very good | Major strengths |
| 4 | Good | Important strengths, with some areas for improvement |
| 3 | Adequate | Strengths just outweigh weaknesses |
| 2 | Weak | Important weaknesses - priority action required |
| 1 | Unsatisfactory | Major weaknesses - urgent remedial action required |

More details here: <https://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/inspections/change-of-grades>

1. **Financial support with childcare costs.**

**Up-front payment for register childcare.**

Up-front payment is a payment that Jobcentre Plus can offer to people who receive Universal Credit and have the starting day of their new job – this needs to be proved by showing a job offer, agreement or relevant correspondence, like e—mail from employer.

Up-front payment offers one month of childcare costs and parents don’t have to give any money back.

To receive this support, it is necessary to book an appointment with the Work Coach at the Jobcentre, take a form, fill the form up, take the form to the childcare provider to fill up the relevant section, book another appointment with Work Coach and check all the details and approve the form by the Work Coach. Parent needs to ask for invoice for first month of childcare and Jobcentre will pay full amount (there is no maximum) to the childcare provider.

**Flexible Support Fund** -

This option is discretionary, and parents don’t have an automatic right and it is not very clear who qualify for it. Decision depends on the local Jobcentre Plus adviser.

FSF aims to help people who start new job and help them to remove barriers towards employment. FSF can offer up-front payment for childcare, transport costs to attend to interview and costs of commuting to work for a first month, tools and clothing/uniforms to start work.

To apply for FSF it is necessary to book an appointment with Work Coach at the local Jobcentre.

**Universal Credit and childcare costs**

If parents need to pay for childcare and they **work** and **receive Universal Credit** (both parents must work, unless one parent cannot look after child/ren) they can have some of the costs pay back.

Parents have to pay for childcare costs themselves. Then they need to report to UC, upload invoices and UC pays up to 85% of the childcare costs back.

Parent will only get the money back after the childcare actually happens.

**How much people can get?**

Parents can get up to 85% of childcare costs paid back. The maximum amount a month is:

* £646.35 for one child
* £1,108.04 for 2 or more children

It is possible to claim back up to 3 months of past childcare costs at a time - but if parents are claiming for more than one month you might not get all the money back.

Universal Credit will cover ‘reasonable’ childcare costs that help you work or get into work. That could include:

* a ‘settling-in period’ before you start work, so your child can get used to being in childcare
* childcare while you travel to work
* childcare in the month after you lose a job

Universal Credit can pay some of the childcare costs for only register childcare provider:

nursery, childminder, After School Club, Breakfast Club, Summer Club.

More information here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-credit-childcare-costs>

**Tax-Free Childcare**

Parents who work and do not receive any benefits can claim Tax-Free Childcare. This is up to £500 every 3 months (up to £2,000 a year) for each of their children to help with the costs of childcare. This goes up to £1,000 every 3 months if a child is disabled (up to £4,000 a year).

Parent needs to set up online childcare account and then for every £8 paid into this account, the government will pay in £2 to use to pay childcare provider.

This works only for registered childcare providers.

Eligibility depends on:

* if people work
* their income (and your partner’s income, if you have one)
* child’s age and circumstances
* immigration status

Parents can usually get Tax-Free Childcare if they (and their partner, if they have one) are:

* in work
* on sick leave or annual leave
* on shared parental, maternity, paternity or adoption leave

Income:

Over the next 3 months parent and their partner (if they have one) must each expect to earn at least:

* £2,167 if you’re aged 23 or over
* £2,117 if you’re aged 21 or 22
* £1,557 if you’re aged 18 to 20
* £1,098 if you’re under 18 or an apprentice

Child must be 11 years old or under.

Parents must have National Insurance Number, British citizenship, pre-settled or settled status, permission to access public funds - your UK residence card will tell you if you cannot do this.

To apply parents must visit a website: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-tax-free-childcare>

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