

Parents' & carers' guide to the...

learn play fun

Flexible **Free** Entitlement for...



3 and 4 yr olds



www.northlincs.gov.uk

Going to an early years provider is valuable and exciting for children. They can:

- **Learn through play**
- **Experience new activities**
- **Get a good start to education**
- **Make new friends and above all**
- **Have fun**

The great news is that all three and four year olds are entitled to 15 hours a week free early learning and care at a provider during term time.

This is known as the flexible free entitlement. Children become eligible for funding the term after their third birthday.



What does flexible entitlement mean?

The free entitlement can be used flexibly to best meet family circumstances.

You may use your child's 15 hour entitlement in a combination of hours, for three to five days per week between the core hours of 9am and 5pm. If you want to use your child's free entitlement over just two days you can only receive 12 hours of the entitlement per week. If however, the provider is open you may be able to increase the number of weeks that your child receives their entitlement over the year. The level of flexibility available will be subject to reasonable parent demand and

your chosen provider's ability to meet such demands. Where required you can use the free entitlement across two providers to meet your family circumstances.

If you use two providers, neither of whom are Local Authority, you must make it clear to both providers where you wish to claim your funded hours, remembering that funding is for up to a maximum of 15 hours a week (for a 38 week year). If one provider is a Local Authority nursery/school the Local Authority provider is funded first, up to the maximum of 15 hours per week (for a 38 week year).

Choosing an early years provider

You can use the free entitlement for your child at:

- a private day nursery
- a pre-school or playgroup
- a children's centre where day care is available
- an accredited childminder
- a school nursery

Whichever you choose they will all be working towards the Early Years Foundation Stage. Early learning is through play, tailored to each individual child, to enable them to develop at their own pace.

Visit your preferred provider and check that it is right for your child and your family - it is for you to decide.

When can my child receive their free entitlement?

You will be able to claim your child's flexible free entitlement from:

Children who are 3 between:

1 January and 31 March

Can have a free place from:

Summer Term (April)

Children who are 3 between:

1 April and 31 August

Can have a free place from:

Autumn Term (September)

Children who are 3 between:

1 September and 31 December

Can have a free place from:

Spring Term (January)



What do I need to do to access my child's free entitlement?

If your child is not already attending a provider, you will need to make sure that they are registered to attend and they start the term they are eligible.

When your child is eligible the provider will give you a parent agreement form to complete, sign and return along with a copy of your child's birth certificate. Proof of your child's date of birth is only required when they first receive their free entitlement.



What is the parent agreement?

The parent agreement details the funded and additional hours your child will be accessing at your chosen provider and this will be signed by you and the provider. The agreement will last for a minimum of one term. It is expected that parents will not, except in exceptional circumstances, move between providers during the term. You should discuss any exceptional circumstances with your provider. In addition you cannot increase or decrease your child's free entitlement during the term.

If you choose to move provider a notice period will be honoured with your existing provider prior to any funding moving to your child's new provider. During this period you will be required to pay for any hours attended at the new provider.

You are able to change provider and/or the number of hours claimed at the start of a new term. If you don't make any changes the previous agreement is still valid. If any of your or your child's personal details change a new agreement will need to be completed.

Breaking the parent agreement

The parent agreement is your commitment to take your child for your chosen hours each week unless they are sick, have medical appointments or are on holiday (two weeks a term is deemed acceptable). You must inform your provider of your child's absence.

If your child is persistently absent (absent for two weeks with no contact, regularly not attending for the full hours claimed or missing regularly for the same hours each week) the provider will terminate your agreement and you will lose your child's free place. If your child is absent for two weeks without contact with the provider the Local Authority will be made aware of this and will contact you to ensure the well-being of your child.

Your provider may also terminate your agreement if you breach their contract, for example non-payment of fees for additional hours.

Is it really free?

North Lincolnshire Council will pay for your child's free hours at your chosen provider, based on your parent agreement. You are not required to pay any fees for your child's free entitlement. This includes a deposit (for the period of the free entitlement), uniform or lunch. However, if you choose to access additional services as part of the free entitlement, for example a uniform or a meal prepared by the provider for your child, you may be charged. You are able to access additional hours for your child and pay the fees as agreed with the provider. Your bill will clearly state your free hours and any charges for additional hours/services. You will have a separate contract with the provider for additional hours/services. If you break your parent agreement and leave the provider you will still be liable for any outstanding fees or additional services, including any notice periods.



For further information:

If you would like further information on the free entitlement or would like a list of registered providers please contact:

Family Information Service (FIS)

Hewson House
Station Road
Brigg
NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE
DN20 8XJ
Tel: 01724 296629

