

Child maintenance arrangements made after speaking to Child Maintenance Options

Data up to December 2017

Quarterly

Published: 25th April 2018
Great Britain

Experimental

Child Maintenance Options is a free service that provides impartial information and support to help parents make informed choices about child maintenance.

- In December 2017, we surveyed parents who called Child Maintenance Options between August and October 2017.
- We asked parents about their types of child maintenance arrangements and if they thought it was working well.
- The estimates in this publication are based on those telephone interviews.

Main Stories



82%

18% of parents set up a family-based arrangement after speaking to Options

82% of parents with a family-based arrangement said it worked well

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Feedback is welcome

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What you need to know

Child maintenance is support between separated parents to help with the everyday costs of looking after children.

If they agree, separated parents can arrange child maintenance themselves. This is called a '**family-based arrangement**' and is a private way to sort out child maintenance. Parents arrange everything themselves and no-one else has to be involved. Family-based arrangements can be regular financial payments or flexible arrangements which may include a financial element or transactions in kind.

The Child Maintenance Service, which replaces the Child Support Agency (CSA), is for when parents can't agree to a family-based arrangement. Parents wishing to use the Child Maintenance Service must first speak to Child Maintenance Options (Options) who can refer them to the Child Maintenance Service. For information on the performance of the Child Maintenance Service please see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-on-the-2012-statutory-child-maintenance-scheme>

Child Maintenance Options is a free service that provides impartial information and support to help separated parents make decisions about their child maintenance arrangements.

Child maintenance can also be arranged through the court system.

Types of arrangement and Children Benefiting

A **flexible family-based arrangement** is a family-based arrangement that contains non-regular payments for the support of children or payments in kind.

Some child maintenance arrangements are **set up or changed after contacting Child Maintenance Options**. **Other** child maintenance arrangements are made before contact with Child Maintenance Options and do not change after contacting Options.

A family-based arrangement consisting of regular financial payments is counted as **functioning** if all or some of the agreed money is being paid. A flexible family-based arrangement is considered to be **functioning** if the parent surveyed believes it is working fairly well or very well.

For family-based arrangements consisting of regular financial payments, **Children benefiting** is the number of children for whom a paying parent is contributing some or all of the due child maintenance. For flexible family-based arrangements it is the number of children covered by a child maintenance arrangement where the surveyed parent believes it is working fairly or very well.

For more details see the Background Information document:

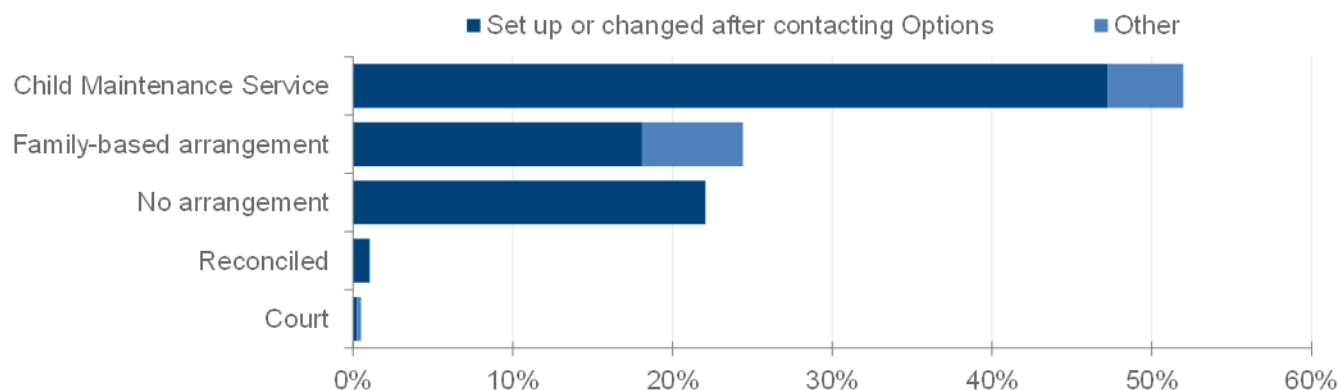
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/effective-family-based-child-maintenance-arrangements-statistics-background-information-and-methodology>

Child Maintenance Arrangements

Out of the 56,800 parents that had contact with Child Maintenance Options between August and October 2017, 77% had a child maintenance arrangement at the time of surveying. That is 43,700 Child Maintenance Service, court and family-based arrangements.

18% of parents set up a family-based arrangement after speaking to Options

Types of child maintenance arrangements made by parents who contacted Child Maintenance Options between August and October 2017 and were surveyed in December 2017



Almost a quarter (24%) of parents who contacted Child Maintenance Options had a family-based arrangement. Around 1 in 5 parents (18%) set up or changed their family-based arrangement after contacting Options, while 6% already had a family-based arrangement. Not all parents with family-based arrangements will contact Child Maintenance Options so the true number of parents with family-based arrangements may be higher.

52% of parents who contacted Child Maintenance Options have an arrangement with the Child Maintenance Service. 47% of all parents set up their arrangement with the Child Maintenance Service after speaking to Options and 5% already had their arrangement in place before they called Options between August and October 2017.

22% of parents had not agreed a child maintenance arrangement after contacting Options. This is a reduction of 2% from the previous survey. This is not a statistically significant change (see **About these statistics** for details).

'Other' includes arrangements set up before a parent's most recent contact with Child Maintenance Options. It also includes arrangements where the parent cannot remember whether they set up the arrangement before or after contact with Options.

See **Table 1** for full data.

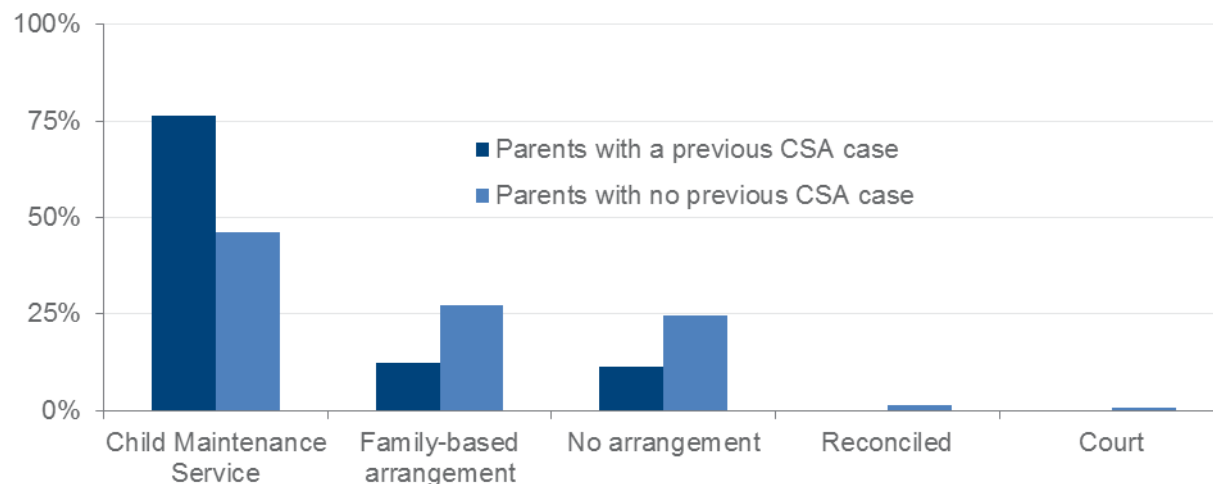
Parents with a previous Child Support Agency case

The Child Support Agency (CSA) only handles existing child maintenance cases. New applications are dealt with by the Child Maintenance Service. Child maintenance arrangements made through the CSA will be ending in 2018, except for payments of built-up arrears. Parents have been contacted and encouraged to contact Child Maintenance Options for support in agreeing a new child maintenance arrangement. Further information and statistics on the performance and closure of the Child Support Agency can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/child-support-agency-quarterly-summary-statistics--2>

Parents with previous CSA cases are identified through calls to a dedicated Child Maintenance Options telephone number. Some parents with CSA cases may not use this number so the true number of parents who had CSA cases may be higher.

76% of parents with CSA cases who contacted Options decided to apply to the Child Maintenance Service

Child Maintenance Arrangements made by parents who contacted Child Maintenance Options between August and October 2017 by parent history, surveyed in December 2017



76% of parents with previous CSA cases set up a new child maintenance arrangement with the Child Maintenance Service following contact with Child Maintenance Options. This is a statistically significant difference from the 46% of parents who do not have previous involvement with the CSA.

The remaining parents with previous CSA cases who contacted Options made a Family-based arrangement or did not set up a child maintenance arrangement. 11% of former CSA clients who contacted Options reported having no arrangement, compared with 25% of other clients. This is another statistically significant difference (see **About these statistics** for details).

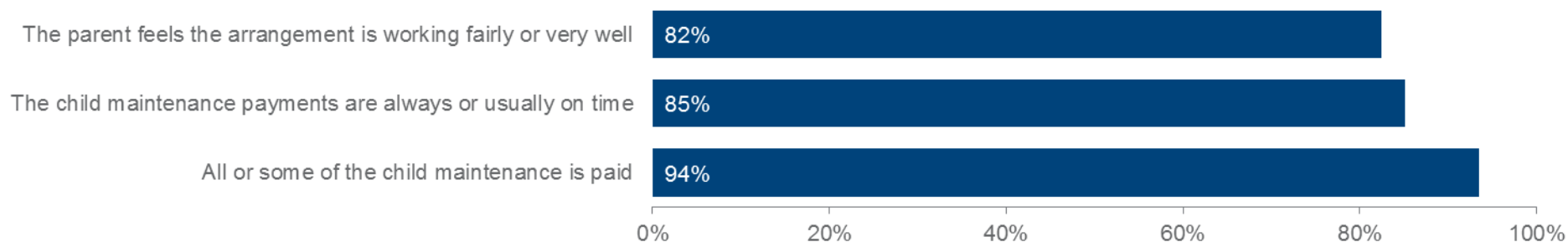
See **Table 2** for full data.

Family-based arrangements

If they agree, separated parents can arrange child maintenance themselves. This is called a **'family-based arrangement'**. Parents in this survey are all asked whether they feel their family-based arrangements are working well. If the arrangement involves a financial element, parents are asked whether payments are being made in part or in full, and whether they are being paid on time.

82% of parents with a family-based arrangement thought it worked well

Assessments of family-based arrangement by parents who contacted Options between August and October 2017, and were surveyed in December 2017



More than 4 in every 5 parents surveyed agreed that their family-based arrangement was working well. Out of the parents with a financial family-based arrangement, 85% said their payments were on time and 94% said payments were paid in full or in part. 83% of parents said they paid or received some or all of their child maintenance **and** it was usually or always on time.

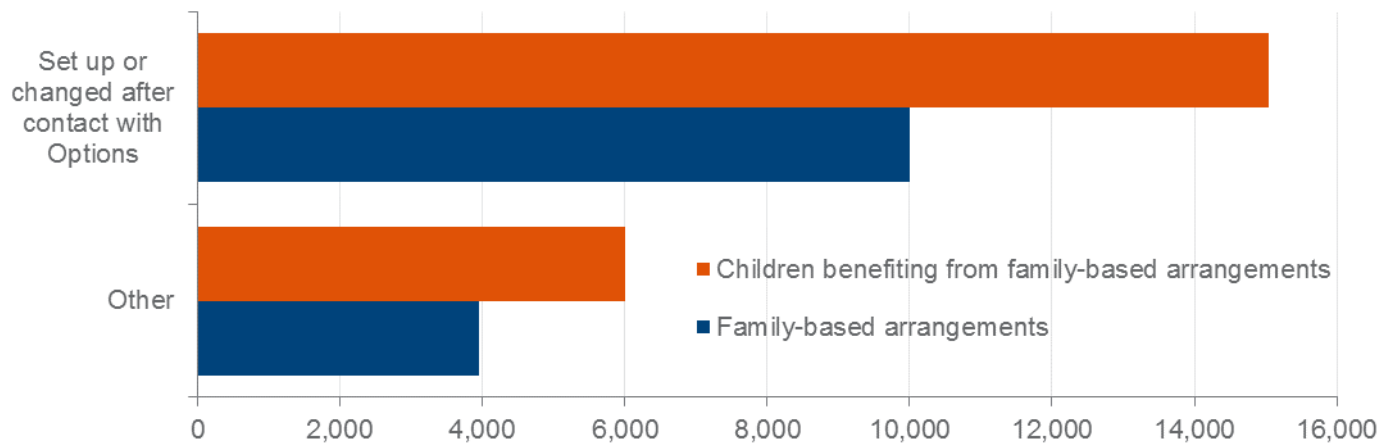
See **Table 3** for full data.

Children benefiting from family-based arrangements

21,000 children were benefitting from functioning family-based arrangements where a parent contacted Options between August and October 2017. A family-based arrangement consisting of regular financial payments is counted as **functioning** if all or some of the agreed money is being paid. A flexible family-based arrangement is considered to be **functioning** if the parent surveyed believes it is working fairly well or very well.

10,000 functioning family-based arrangements were created after contacting Options

Functioning family-based arrangements and children benefiting for parents who contacted Child Maintenance Options between August and October 2017, surveyed in December 2017



10,000 functioning family-based arrangements were set up or changed by parents after contacting Child Maintenance Options in August-October 2017. 15,000 children are benefitting from these arrangements.

There were an additional 4,000 functioning family-based arrangements that had not been set up after contact with Options. This could be because the arrangement was set up before the parent contacted Options or the parents could not remember if they set up their arrangement before or after they spoke to Options. These are classed as other family-based arrangements. 6,000 children benefit from these.

See **Table 4** for full data.

About these statistics

The data is produced through quarterly and an annual longitudinal survey conducted by Child Maintenance Options on behalf of the DWP.

The population is all separated parents who have had a full telephone discussion about their child maintenance needs with Child Maintenance Options.

In the quarterly surveys, the results are weighted to be representative of the number of parents who had a full telephone conversation about their child maintenance needs with Child Maintenance Options. For the annual survey, the results are weighted to be representative of the different child maintenance arrangements parents said they had in the quarterly surveys.

Certain types of parents are excluded from the sampling frame for practical purposes, including non-English speakers and parents who opt out of being contacted for research purposes.

A result is **statistically significant** if it cannot be attributed to chance. This publication measures statistical significance at the 95% level which means you would only expect to see the result caused by chance 1 in 20 times.

These statistics have been developed using guidelines set out by the UK Statistics Authority. These guidelines can be found here:

<https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/the-code/>

Where to find out more

This document and the summary tables can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/child-maintenance-arrangements-made-after-speaking-to-cm-options-dec-2017>

Older releases: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/family-based-child-maintenance-arrangements-statistics>

How we plan to evaluate child maintenance reform: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/387584/child-maintenance-reforms-evaluation-strategy.pdf

The Child Maintenance Options website has further information on their work: <http://www.cmoptions.org/>

Information and statistics on the Child Maintenance Service can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-on-the-2012-statutory-child-maintenance-scheme>