



[Home](#) ▾ [Parenting, childcare and children's services](#) ▾ [Divorce, separation and legal issues](#)
▾ [Child maintenance](#)

Guidance

Telling the Child Maintenance Service about living arrangements

How your child's living arrangements affect child maintenance payments, and when to report a change to the Child Maintenance Service.

From:

[Department for Work and Pensions](#)

Published:

7 August 2026



[Get emails about this page](#)

Contents

- [Common changes to living arrangements](#)
- [Your child's day-to-day care](#)
- [Your child's overnight stays](#)
- [How to report a change to your child's living arrangements](#)
- [Keeping track of changes](#)

There are two parts of a child's living arrangements that can affect child maintenance:

- who provides most of a child's day-to-day care – this usually decides who pays and who receives child maintenance
- how many nights the child stays with each parent – this can affect how much child maintenance is paid

Find out more about [how the Child Maintenance Service works out child maintenance](#).

Common changes to living arrangements

You should tell the Child Maintenance Service if your child:

- has started living with you
- has stopped living with you
- stays overnight with the other parent more or less often
- is now cared for by both parents equally
- has moved into foster care or local authority care

Tell the Child Maintenance Service if [your child's living arrangements change](#).

Your child's day-to-day care

The parent who provides most of a child's day-to-day care will be the one receiving payments. This parent is often called the main carer or the receiving parent.

The main carer is usually the parent who the child lives with. They will often be responsible for things like

taking the child to medical appointments and making sure they have what they need for school.

You may also see this parent referred to as the main day-to-day carer, the primary carer, the person or parent with care, or the resident parent.

Deciding who the main carer is

You are usually the main carer if you are responsible for more than half of your child's day-to-day care. To decide who a child's main carer is, the Child Maintenance Service will consider how often each parent is responsible for:

- being the child's emergency contact for school or for a childminder
- looking after the child outside school, nursery or college hours
- providing basic essentials like meals, toiletries, school uniform and everyday clothes
- arranging and paying for childcare
- arranging and taking the child to medical appointments
- arranging and taking the child to regular activities or hobbies

They will also consider who receives Child Benefit or any other government financial support, for example Disability Living Allowance for children or an extra amount of Universal Credit.

When someone other than a child's named parents becomes their legal main carer, they are still called the receiving parent. This could happen if a child has been adopted or permanently goes to live with a relative.

When the main carer changes

You need to tell the Child Maintenance Service if the main carer changes and they are no longer responsible for more than half of the child's day-to-day care. This could be because:

- both parents start sharing day-to-day care responsibilities equally
- the paying parent becomes the main carer instead
- someone else has become the main carer, for example a relative or family friend
- the child has been taken into care

If the parents share overnight care equally but not day-to-day responsibilities, the main carer doesn't change.

How changing the main carer affects payments

Once the Child Maintenance Service has confirmed the main carer has changed, the parent who was previously paying child maintenance:

- does not need to make any more regular payments to the original main carer for that child
- needs to continue making regular payments for any other children they have with the original main carer
- needs to pay any money owed in arrears

The changes to payments for the child will depend on the situation:

- if there is a new main carer, they can apply to receive child maintenance and the original main carer may need to start paying child maintenance instead
- if both parents start to share day-to-day care equally and there is no main carer, no child maintenance needs to be paid
- if the child has been taken into local authority care, the Child Maintenance Service will review the

situation and decide what happens to payments

Your child's overnight stays

The number of nights a child stays with each parent can also affect how much child maintenance is paid. The Child Maintenance Service calls this overnight shared care.

If the paying parent looks after the child for 52 nights a year or more, their child maintenance payments may be reduced.

Daytime visits on their own cannot be used to work out overnight shared care reductions.

What counts as overnight shared care

Overnight shared care can happen regularly, for example every other weekend, or less often on occasions like birthdays or Christmas.

Usually, it means the child will be staying overnight with the paying parent, either at their home or somewhere else, such as while on holiday together.

An overnight stay can still count as shared care if the child stays somewhere else without the paying parent. This will count if the paying parent is responsible for the child that night and would be the person contacted in an emergency.

If someone else is responsible for the child overnight and would deal with any emergency, the night does not count as overnight shared care.

Overnight shared care also includes when a child stays overnight with a foster parent or in a care home.

Equal shared care

When a child stays overnight with each parent for the

same amount of time, this is called equal shared care. This usually means the child stays with each parent for around half of the nights in a year.

Having a child for the same number of nights does not automatically mean there is no child maintenance to pay. The Child Maintenance Service will also look at who provides most of the child's day-to-day care.

When overnight shared care changes

You need to tell the Child Maintenance Service when a child's overnight stays with the paying parent, a foster carer or in a care home:

- start, when there were previously none
- stop
- work out as a different weekly average

The Child Maintenance Service works out the average number of overnight stays each week based on your usual arrangements. They add up the total number of overnight stays in a year and divide the total by 52 (the number of weeks in the year).

For example, if a child stays with the paying parent 2 nights every fortnight, this adds up to 52 nights a year. This is an average of 1 night a week.

If a child stays with the paying parent for 6 weeks every summer and 2 weeks every Christmas, this adds up to 56 nights a year. This still works out as an average of 1 night a week.

It is important to keep a record of how many nights your child stays with you. A change in the yearly total could change the weekly average and affect the child maintenance calculation. Use [the table of reductions based on overnight stays](#) to work out if a change would affect your payments.

How changes to overnight shared care affect payments

If the average number of overnight stays changes, the amount of child maintenance may increase, decrease or stay the same.

Changes to overnight stays do not always affect child maintenance payments. It depends on which child maintenance rate the paying parent is on.

See child maintenance rates in [how we work out child maintenance](#).

Changes to overnight stays can affect payments if the paying parent is on:

- Basic, Basic Plus or Reduced rate
- Flat or Nil rate, but they have a variation for additional income not included in the main rules

When overnight stays do not affect payments

A paying parent may not have to pay child maintenance if all of the following apply to them:

- they pay the Flat rate because they receive certain benefits or allowances
- they have no additional income included in the calculation
- the child stays with them for at least 52 nights a year

If this applies, they may also not have to pay child maintenance for any other children covered by the same arrangement with that receiving parent.

Changes to overnight stays will not affect child maintenance payments if the paying parent is on:

- Flat rate because income is £100 a week or less
- Nil rate

When changes to overnight stays affect payments

When the paying parent is on an eligible rate, more overnight stays usually mean a bigger reduction in child maintenance. The table shows how reductions are worked out.

Number of nights with the paying parent each year	Weekly average of overnight stays	Reduction to child maintenance
0 to 51 nights	Less than 1 night	No reduction
52 to 103 nights	1 night	Reduced by one-seventh
104 to 155 nights	2 nights	Reduced by two-sevenths
156 to 174 nights	3 nights	Reduced by three-sevenths
175 or more	More than 3 nights	Reduced by a half, plus £7 a week reduction for any child in this band the paying parent pays for

For example, if a child previously stayed with the paying parent 110 nights a year (an average of 2 nights a week), but now stays 103 nights a year (an average of 1 night a week), the payments would be reduced by one-seventh, instead of two-sevenths.

If a child previously stayed 170 nights a year (an average of 3 nights a week) and now stays 158 nights a year, there would be no change to payments because the average nights a week is still 3.

If the paying parent is on a Reduced or Basic child maintenance rate, payments cannot go below £7 a

week.

When a child starts staying an equal number of nights with each parent

If a child starts staying with the paying parent for an average of more than 3 nights a week, the Child Maintenance Service will ask both parents whether the main carer has changed. This is because a child who stays with each parent for roughly the same amount of time may have different day-to-day care arrangements.

The Child Maintenance Service will ask both parents for information about the child's care arrangements. You may also need to provide supporting evidence.

When a child stays with a foster carer or in a care home

When the paying parent is on an eligible rate, changing to a different weekly average of overnight stays with a foster carer or in a care home could mean a different reduction.

Number of nights with a foster carer or in a care home each year	Weekly average of overnight stays	Reduction to child maintenance
0 to 51 nights	Less than 1 night	No reduction
52 to 103 nights	1 night	Reduced by one-seventh
104 to 155 nights	2 nights	Reduced by two-sevenths
156 to 207 nights	3 nights	Reduced by three-sevenths
208 to 259 nights	4 nights	Reduced by four-sevenths

260 to 262 nights	5 nights	Reduced by five-sevenths
263 nights or more	More than 5 nights	No child maintenance needs to be paid

For example, if a child stays 5 nights every week with a foster carer and 2 nights a week with their main carer, the payment their main carer receives would be reduced by five-sevenths.

If a child stays some nights with a foster carer on in a care home and stays some nights with the paying parent, the Child Maintenance Service can add them together and reduce payments based on the total number of shared care nights.

How to report a change to your child's living arrangements

Report a change to your child's living arrangements using your online [Child Maintenance Service account](#).

If you do not have online access, [contact the Child Maintenance Service](#).

Either parent can report a change to a child's caring arrangements.

If you are a paying parent, you should continue making your regular payments until the Child Maintenance Service responds to the change. Any updates to payments will be backdated to the date the change took place.

When to report a change

Tell the Child Maintenance Service about a change as

soon as possible after it happens. You can report it on the same day if you are able to.

You can't report a change before it happens.

You should report a change no matter how long you think it is going to last, even if you think it will be temporary.

What happens when you report a change

1. Report the change using your [Child Maintenance Service account](#).
2. Send any supporting evidence.
3. The Child Maintenance Service may contact the other parent for more information.
4. The Child Maintenance Service review the information.
5. The Child Maintenance Service tell you the outcome.
6. Payments change if necessary.

Sending supporting evidence

After reporting a change online, you will have 7 days to upload any supporting evidence you have to your account. If you do not have online access, the Child Maintenance service will let you know how to send supporting evidence when you report the change.

If you do not have supporting evidence, you can still report or respond to a change. The Child Maintenance Service will review the information and tell you their decision.

If you and the other parent agree on the change, the Child Maintenance Service may not need look at your supporting evidence.

Supporting evidence to show you are a child's

main carer

You should send evidence to show you are a child's main carer if you are:

- not currently the named main carer and you are reporting a change to who has this role
- currently the named main carer and you are responding to a change you do not agree with

You do not need to send supporting evidence if you are currently the named main carer and are reporting that you have stopped having this role.

You can send the following types of supporting evidence to show you are the child's main carer.

Legal evidence may include a:

- current court order
- guardianship order
- social services report

Evidence of time you are responsible for the child may include communication from:

- their school, nursery, college or clubs
- their GP, dentist or other medical professional
- anyone who provides paid childcare

Evidence of money you have spent on the child's care may include:

- bank statements
- receipts
- contracts for their childcare or activities
- a letter from HM Revenues and Customs (HMRC) showing you receive Child Benefit

Supporting evidence to show overnight shared care

You should send supporting evidence to show your child's overnight arrangement if you are:

- reporting a change to overnight shared care
- responding to a change to overnight share care that you do not agree with

The Child Maintenance Service can only accept:

- a current court order
- a formal agreement – for example, drawn up by a solicitor
- another official document – for example, reports from Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) or social services

Supporting evidence the Child Maintenance Service cannot accept

The Child Maintenance Service cannot accept:

- communication that is only between you and the other parent
- photos of your child
- screenshots of social media
- calendar entries

Changes that are checked with both parents

The Child Maintenance Service will contact both parents to make sure they have the right information if:

- the paying parent reports the main carer has changed
- either parent reports a change to the number of overnight stays

Once a report is made, the Child Maintenance Service will ask the other parent to respond with their information about the change and any supporting

evidence.

If both parents agree with the change, the Child Maintenance Service may not need to look at any supporting evidence. If both parents do not agree, the Child Maintenance Service will look at any evidence they both provide to help them decide.

In some situations, the Child Maintenance Service may be able to review the change using the information already provided. For example, they do not need to contact both parents if the receiving parent reports that the main carer has changed.

Keeping track of changes

You can see the Child Maintenance Service's progress in 'Track Changes' within your online account.

The Child Maintenance Service will contact you when a decision is made and let you know about any effects on your payments.

Your existing child maintenance arrangement will not change unless the Child Maintenance Service tell you otherwise.

If you disagree with a change to a child's living arrangements

If you think a decision is wrong, you can ask for it to be looked at again. This is called a mandatory reconsideration and is part of the steps to [challenge and appeal a benefit decision](#).

The Child Maintenance Service will be more likely to make a different decision if there is:

- updated information about the change
- new supporting evidence they have not seen before

Your decision letter will tell you how to ask for a decision to be looked at again.

Published 7 August 2026

 [Get emails about this page](#)

[↑ Contents](#)

Explore the topic

[Child maintenance](#)

Help us improve GOV.UK

To help us improve GOV.UK, we'd like to know more about your visit today. [Please fill in this survey \(opens in a new tab\)](#).

Cancel



Services and information

[Benefits](#)

[Births, death, marriages and care](#)

[Business and self-employed](#)

Government activity

[Departments](#)

[News](#)

[Childcare and parenting](#)

[Citizenship and living in the UK](#)

[Crime, justice and the law](#)

[Disabled people](#)

[Driving and transport](#)

[Education and learning](#)

[Employing people](#)

[Environment and countryside](#)

[Housing and local services](#)

[Money and tax](#)

[Passports, travel and living abroad](#)

[Visas and immigration](#)

[Working, jobs and pensions](#)

[Guidance and regulation](#)

[Research and statistics](#)

[Policy papers and consultations](#)

[Transparency](#)

[How government works](#)

[Get involved](#)

[Help](#) [Privacy](#) [Cookies](#) [Accessibility statement](#) [Contact](#)

[Terms and conditions](#) [Rhestr o Wasanaethau Cymraeg](#)

[Government Digital Service](#)

OGI

All content is available under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#), except where otherwise stated



[© Crown copyright](#)

