

Jobseeker's Allowance and flexibilities for lone parents

What are the changes?

We know that, for most people, work is the best route out of poverty and that most lone parents, would like to work. The changes we have introduced will enable lone parents to access the range of help which is available from Jobcentre Plus to help them look for and enter work at an earlier stage, when their child reaches school age.

If you are a lone parent with school age children you may no longer be entitled to Income Support once your youngest child reaches age 5 or over. You may be able to claim Jobseeker's Allowance instead, but to get this you will be required to look for paid work. We will help you with this.

If you are unable to work due to a health condition or disability you may be able to claim Employment and Support Allowance.

You may be able to continue to claim Income Support. For example:

- If you are a foster parent and currently fostering a child;
- In certain circumstances where you are caring for another person; or
- If you regularly and substantially care for a child who is disabled and is entitled to receive the middle or higher rate care component of Disability Living Allowance.

Your adviser will talk to you about continuing to claim if you are entitled to Income Support for additional reasons.

How will this affect me?

This factsheet provides more information on claiming Jobseeker's Allowance. If you would like more information on other benefits, including Employment and Support Allowance, please ask your adviser.

What is Jobseeker's Allowance?

Jobseeker's Allowance is a benefit for people who are not in full time work. To get Jobseeker's Allowance, you must be available for work and actively looking for work. There are other conditions of entitlement too.

When you make a claim for Jobseeker's Allowance you will discuss with your adviser the steps you will take each week to give you the best chance of finding work. These steps will be included in a Jobseeker's Agreement that must be signed by you. Once you have signed it, you will be given a copy to remind you of your discussions. While you are claiming Jobseeker's Allowance we will usually ask you to attend the Jobcentre regularly, usually every two weeks, to discuss the steps you have taken to look for work. This is called a Jobsearch Review. Your Jobseeker's Agreement will also be reviewed regularly and updated by your adviser to reflect the progress you have made in looking for work.

We recognise that, from time to time, lone parents may have certain difficulties in looking for and being available for work as a result of childcare responsibilities. There are flexibilities to help ensure you can meet those responsibilities. There are a number of options available to you but you should speak to your adviser about how these apply in relation to your personal circumstances.

What does 'actively looking for work' mean?

Actively seeking work means you must be doing everything that you reasonably can to try and get work. When you sign on at the Jobcentre we look at what you have been doing to check you have been actively seeking work.

What does 'being available for work' mean?

For most people 'being available for work' means that you must be willing and able to take up work straight away.

As a lone parent with caring responsibilities you are not required to take up employment immediately, provided you are willing and able to take part in an interview within 48 hours and to start work within 1 week.

If you are a lone parent (or otherwise have caring responsibilities for a child) we recognise that you may need more time because of your childcare responsibilities. If this is the case we may be able to allow you 7 days notice to take part in a job interview and 28 days notice to start work after being offered a job.

There are a range of restrictions – for example in relation to travelling time, location of work and terms and conditions – that all JSA claimants can place on their availability, where appropriate. In some circumstances you may be able to restrict work hours even if there is little prospect of finding work at those hours. You should discuss with your Adviser how any restrictions might apply to you.

Can I restrict the number of hours I can work and will that affect my claim for Jobseekers Allowance?

Most jobseekers must be available for at least 40 hours per week but we recognise the crucial role of parents and their need to have time to look after their children. The safeguards available within Jobseeker's Allowance which allow parents to fit their job-search requirements with their caring responsibilities and childcare availability will continue.

If you are a lone parent, you can restrict the number of hours you are available in a particular week, as long as you are available for as many hours as your caring responsibilities allow. This must be for a minimum of 16 hours.

If you have a youngest child aged under 13, you have the right to restrict the hours you are available to work to your child's normal school hours.

If you have a parenting contract/order agreed in relation to your child, you may also be able to arrange or reduce the hours you are available for work to fit in with your childcare responsibilities, providing the restrictions are reasonable in view of the terms of the order or contract.

Are there situations where I am not required to be available for or actively seeking work?

If you are unable to meet the requirements to be available for and actively seeking work, you should discuss this with your adviser as soon as possible. Whatever the age of your child, there are circumstances where we may treat you as meeting one or both of these requirements for a period of time.

These circumstances include:

- if it would be unreasonable for you to make other arrangements for your child's care during the school holidays or whilst they are excluded from school, for example, because you are unable to arrange affordable and appropriate childcare. If these circumstances apply you will need to explain to your adviser why it is unreasonable for you to make other arrangements.
- if there is a death, serious illness or domestic emergency involving a close relative or close friend, or you have a serious illness or domestic emergency. In these circumstances we may accept that for a period of 1 week, on a maximum of 4 occasions in any 12 months, you are not available to take up work. However, if you are a person with caring responsibilities, one of these periods can be increased to up to 8 weeks with the remainder taken in 3 one week periods. This can only happen once in any 12 month period.

- in certain circumstances where you have been a victim of actual or threatened domestic abuse. If this is applicable, you will need to discuss with your adviser whether this easement applies.
- if you have a parenting contract/order agreed in relation to your child, you may also be able to arrange or reduce the hours you are available for work to fit in with your childcare responsibilities.

What happens if my child isn't in school when they reach age five?

From 21 May 2012 if you are a lone parent and your child is aged 5 and has not started school and is not legally required to receive full time education, there is an additional flexibility.

If this applies you will be treated as being available for and actively seeking work if it would be unreasonable for you to make other arrangements for the care of your child, for example because you are unable to arrange appropriate and affordable childcare. You will have to explain to your adviser why it would be unreasonable for you to make other arrangements for the care of your child. This easement will apply until arrangements have been made for the care of your child, they start receiving, or are legally required to receive, full-time education.

What happens if I don't attend a Jobsearch Review?

After you complete your Jobseeker's Agreement, you will have to go to a regular Jobsearch Review. If you cannot attend a review or any other adviser interview, you must notify us in advance. If you miss a review, or if you do not go to any other adviser interview that you are required to attend, you must let us know within 5 working days and explain why you can't attend. You will need to explain showing a good reason for not attending. If you can't show good reason or you do not contact us, your Jobseeker's Allowance may be affected. If you are treated as being available for work, you will have a good reason for failing to attend a Jobsearch Review, and we will not ask you to attend.

What happens if I am offered a job but can't find childcare?

You are expected to take up reasonable offers of work. If you refuse a job offer because affordable and appropriate childcare was not available, an adviser will discuss this with you and will consider whether it was reasonable for you to do so. If you can't show good reason, your Jobseeker's Allowance may be affected.

What happens if my childcare arrangements fail and I have to leave my job?

If you leave your job because you have problems with childcare or for other reasons, we will consider whether it was reasonable for you to do so. If you can't show good reason, your Jobseeker's Allowance may be affected.

Where should I go for more information?

To find out more about getting into work or training, you can:

- visit **www.direct.gov.uk**
- Arrange an appointment with an adviser at your nearest Jobcentre by calling **0845 604 3719** (textphone **0845 608 8551**)

Textphones are for people who you can't speak or hear clearly. Textphone numbers don't accept voice calls or text messages from mobile phones

Calls to **0845** numbers from BT land lines should cost no more than 5p a minute with a 13p call set-up charge. You may pay more if you use another phone company or a mobile phone. Calls from mobile phones can cost up to 40p a minute, so check the cost of calls with your service provide. Charges were correct at the time of drafting (May 2012).