

Fostering and Welfare Benefits

Factsheet

If you are a foster carer or are thinking about becoming one, you'll want to know how this may affect your entitlement to benefits and the things we will expect you to do while you are getting them. This will vary depending on your personal circumstances and which benefit you are getting.

How will I be affected?

This factsheet provides general information on what we will ask you to do while claiming any of the following benefits while you are fostering or are awaiting a placement:

- Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income Support
- Employment and Support Allowance
- Carer's Allowance, or
- Pension Credit.

This may mean talking to an adviser or, if claiming Jobseeker's Allowance, looking for work. It also covers how any income from fostering may affect your entitlement to benefits.

How will I be affected?

Jobseeker's Allowance

To get Jobseeker's Allowance, you must be available for work and actively looking for work and meet other conditions of entitlement.

We will agree with you the steps you will take to look for work and record these in a Jobseeker's Agreement. While you are claiming Jobseeker's Allowance we will ask you to attend the Jobcentre regularly, usually every two weeks.

You must usually be available for work for at least 40 hours per week. We recognise as a foster carer that sometimes this may be difficult for you. As such you are able to place restrictions on your availability providing that:

- you are available for work for as many hours as your caring responsibilities allow, **and**
- you generally have to have reasonable prospects of securing employment (this may not apply to you if you have caring responsibilities for a child and it is decided that additional limitations apply in your circumstances), **and**
- you are available for work of at least 16 hours per week.

Your Jobseeker's Agreement will be regularly reviewed and updated by your adviser to show any restrictions on your availability for work and to reflect the progress you have made in looking for work.

If you are a foster carer and currently waiting for a placement, and have no children of your own, you must be available for work for 40 hours per week and continue to actively look for full time work.

Income Support

If you are a lone parent or are a single person without children of your own but do foster a child you may be able to claim Income Support.

You do not have to look for or be available for work in the same way as you do for Jobseeker's Allowance but we will ask you to attend mandatory Work-focused Interviews. The frequency of these will depend on your personal circumstances and if you have any children of your own.

If you have children of your own, where the youngest is over one but under five years old and you are also fostering a child, it is a condition of getting your Income Support that you attend a mandatory Work-focused Interview every six months.

If you are still fostering when your own child reaches five you may still be entitled to Income Support. If so, while you continue to foster a child, you will be asked to attend a Work-focused Interview every three years or if certain changes of circumstance take place.

If you are fostering a child, but do not have any children of your own, you will be asked to attend a Work-focused Interview as a condition of getting your Income Support when you first make your claim. After your first attendance, while you continue to foster a child, you will be asked to attend a Work-focused Interview every three years or if certain changes of circumstance take place.

If you do not attend a Work-focused Interview when asked to do so without a good reason, your Income Support may be affected.

Employment and Support Allowance

You do not have to look for work and be available for work in the same way you do when claiming Jobseeker's Allowance. However, if you are placed in the Work-Related Activity Group we may ask you to attend mandatory Work-focused Interviews. We may also ask you to take part in mandatory Work-Related Activity.

There are some circumstances when we will not ask you to attend a mandatory Work-focused Interview or take part in Work-Related Activity, for example, if you are a lone parent and have a child of your own who has not yet started school. Your adviser will tell you what activities you may need to do in your circumstances. However, if you want to volunteer to take part in Work-Related Activity your adviser can give you further details.

If you do not attend a Work-focused Interview or undertake Work-Related Activity when asked to do so without a good reason, your Employment and Support Allowance may be affected.

What is the Work Programme?

The Work Programme can help you prepare for, find and stay in work. Your adviser will talk to you about the Work Programme if you are eligible or wish to volunteer. The support you get will be tailored to your individual needs and circumstances and will last up to two years.

Attendance on the Work Programme will be either mandatory or voluntary depending on your personal circumstances and the benefit you are receiving.

Where can I find out more?

If you are currently fostering or considering becoming a foster carer you should speak to your adviser. They will provide you with further information about what we expect of you when you are claiming benefits.

Carer's Allowance

You do not have to look for work or attend mandatory Work-focused Interviews if you are getting only Carer's Allowance. If you are thinking about work, or if you are considering enhancing your skills, on a voluntary basis, you should speak to an adviser who will discuss this and other support that may be available to you.

Pension Credit

You do not have to look for work or attend mandatory Work-focused Interviews if you are getting only Pension Credit.

How can income from fostering affect my benefit?

Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support and Employment and Support Allowance

How we treat any income you get for fostering will depend on who pays it to you and if you get benefit based on either your income or any National Insurance contributions you have paid.

If a Local Authority, voluntary organisation or a private organisation on behalf of the Local Authority pays your fostering income this has no effect on the amount of benefit you get.

If your fostering income isn't paid by a Local Authority, voluntary organisation or a private organisation on behalf of the Local Authority, we may take your income into account regardless of whether your benefit is based on your income or contributions. You should contact us to find out how your benefit may be affected in your personal circumstances.

To find out more information about how your fostering income may affect your benefit go to our website or call the Benefit Centre which pays your benefit:

www.direct.gov.uk/benefits

If you don't already receive benefit you should call Jobcentre Plus, the number is available in your local telephone directory or go our website:

www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/Jobseekers/ContactJobcentrePlus/DG_186347

Carer's Allowance

How we treat any income you get from fostering will depend on who pays it and the arrangement under which it is paid.

If you are receiving an allowance from a local authority, care authority or voluntary organisation for a child who has been placed in your care under a fostering arrangement with that body, this payment can be disregarded.

Pension Credit

If you are a foster carer then you are treated as self employed. If a Local Authority or a voluntary organisation pays your fostering allowance then that income is not counted as earnings and has no affect on the amount of Pension Credit you get.

Where Should I go for More Information?

To find out more about fostering and benefit, you can:

- go to fostering related pages on our website: **www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Adoptionfosteringandchildrenincare/Fostering**
- go to benefit related pages on our website: **www.direct.gov.uk/benefits**
- call for general benefit advice (Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.30pm): freephone **0800 882 200** (Textphone: **0800 243 355**)
- Contact Jobcentre Plus and speak to an adviser, the number is available in your local telephone directory or on our website: **www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/Jobseekers/contactJobcentrePlus/DG_186347**

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 as of September 2012.

For general information and enquiries about Carer's Allowance you can contact:

Carer's Allowance Unit

Palatine House, Lancaster Road, Preston, PR1 1HB

Telephone: **0845 608 4321**

Textphone: **0845 604 5312**

You can contact these numbers between 8.30am and 5.00pm Monday to Thursday, and between 8.30am and 4.30pm on Fridays.

For general information and enquiries about Pension Credit you can contact:

The Pension Service

Telephone: **0845 6060625**

Textphone: **0845 6060285**

You can contact these numbers between 8.00am and 8.00pm Monday to Friday.