

Work-related requirements for claimants with children

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Nominating a lead carer

The lead carer is the person with the main responsibility in a household for looking after a child.

Couples with children who claim Universal Credit must nominate a lead carer. This is so that work-related requirements for the lead carer can be tailored to suit their childcare responsibilities.

Couples are only allowed to change the nominated lead carer once a year - or following a change of circumstance affecting who cares for the child.

A claimant who is a lone parent automatically becomes the lead carer.

Work-related requirements

The lead carer's circumstances or the age of the youngest child in the household determines their work-related requirements. They are placed in the regime with the lowest conditionality for their circumstances whilst the other member of the couple will be placed in the appropriate regime relevant to their circumstances.

Example:

A claimant has Limited Capability for Work and would normally fall into the Work Preparation regime but is the lead carer of a child under 1 and would be placed into the No Work Related Requirements regime until the child turns 1. They will then be placed in the Work Focused Interview only regime. See Labour Market regimes.

The table below shows the regime into which the lead carer should be placed. It is based only on the age of the youngest child:

Age of youngest child	Regime
Under age 1	No Work Related Requirements
Age 1	Work Focused Interview only
Age 2	<p>Work Preparation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • minimum quarterly interviews • maximum Conditionality Earnings Threshold (CET) of 16 hours • caring responsibilities must be taken in to account when setting expected hours of work preparation • lead carers of children aged 2 are not required to be available for work, mandatory work search and work availability are switched-off
Age 3 and above, where the lead carer is either not working or their earnings are below the Administrative Earnings Threshold	<p>Intensive Work Search:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • where the youngest child is aged 3 or 4, the CET is set to a maximum 16 hours per week. • where the youngest child is aged 5 to 12, the CET is 25 hours per week • caring responsibilities must be taken in to account when setting expected hours of work preparation, work search and work availability • the lead carer will be required to undertake weekly work search interviews for the first 13 weeks

Tailoring the Conditionality Earnings Threshold for lead carers with a child below compulsory school age

The Conditionality Earnings Threshold can be reduced if a lead carer has one or more of the following:

- difficult travel time to a childcare provider – for example, poor public transport links when taking and collecting the child from childcare provision
- a health condition and the claimant is awaiting the health assessment

- part-time or temporary caring responsibilities for someone - for example, an elderly relative or a child where the claimant isn't the lead carer
- a lack of childcare availability in the claimant's residential area suitable for the needs of the child

Tailoring travel to work time for parents with children aged 3 or 4

Travel to work time for lead carers of children aged 3 or 4 must be proportionate to their expected hours of 16 per week. The following caps should apply:

- 10 to 16 hours weekly work search requirements - capped at 60 minutes
- Up to 10 hours weekly work search requirements - capped at 30 minutes.

Both these caps can be varied further to take into account individual circumstances

Skills and vocational training for parents with children aged 2 to 4

To recognise that lead carers of children aged 2 to 4 years old may be further from the job market and have fewer skills than parents with older children, they must be encouraged to participate in training that takes longer than the normal period of up to 8 weeks.

If it is considered that the course or training will ensure the lead carer is in work by the time the youngest child reaches 5, the claimant's requirements can be switched-off or adjusted for up to one year.

Example:

A lead carer who used to be a nurse has the opportunity to take a 6-month course to update their skills. The work search requirements can be adjusted to 0 hours, as the training is 20 hours per week, when the lead carer starts the training.

This is 'tailoring' and is recorded in the Claimant Commitment. It does not impact on the Conditionality Earnings Threshold or a claimant's expected hours of work. This type of tailoring is restricting, removing or switching-off requirements.

Friend and family carers

Friend and family carers will be placed in the Work Focused Interview only group for the first year that a claimant has responsibility for a child under 16.

Evidence must be provided within one month of the claimant being allocated to the regime to confirm they are correctly placed. Evidence could include:

- social workers or the courts
- teachers and other professional staff within a school or college

- GP's, consultants, health visitors or hospital staff
- prison staff
- police officers involved in the circumstances of the child
- drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres or organisations
- housing officers
- child and adolescent mental health services
- Child Benefit claims, although Child Benefit may not always be in place, a friend or family carer may just have applied or there may be a dispute

If a claimant is unable to provide evidence within 1 month, the child will be removed from that claim and the claimant will be allocated to the appropriate regime.

Foster carers

A claimant who is a single foster carer or a lead carer in a fostering couple, with a foster child under 16, will be placed in the Work Focused Interview only group.

In exceptional circumstances, the claimant will remain in the Work Focused Interview only group if there is evidence that the foster child aged 16-17 has recognised care needs and requires full-time care. See Foster carers.

Adoptive parents

A parent who is the lead carer for an adopted child will be allocated to the No Work Related Requirements group for 12 months. The 12-month period will start from the date the child moves into the household or from up to 14 days earlier if the claimant requests.

Child in considerable distress

Work-related requirements may be temporarily switched-off for up to 1 month when a lead carer is responsible for a child in considerable distress due to:

- the death of a parent, sibling, member of the household or person previously caring for the child
- experiencing or witnessing domestic violence and abuse, where a police report may be available
- experiencing or witnessing violence and abuse other than domestic violence

Lead carers may access this switching-off requirements, easement, once every 6 months for a period of two years from the death or incident. This is to take in to account repeated incidents of child distress. See Child in considerable distress.

Death of a child

If a claimant reports the death of a child, work search and availability requirements must be switched off for 6 months or the next 6 assessment periods.

After the initial 3 months, it is optional for the claimant to attend interviews and consider searching or preparing for work. Voluntary support can be introduced for the final 3 months but sanctions will not apply during this period.

See Claimant Commitment Hub – Switching-off work availability and work-related activities.