

Work-related requirements for claimants with children: Guidance

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Nominating a lead carer

The lead carer is the person in the household with the main responsibility 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 will be placed in the regime with the lowest conditionality for their circumstances. If they are part of a couple, 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 will normally fall into the Work Preparation regime but if they are the lead carer of a child under 1, they will be placed into the No Work-related Requirements regime. Once 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 work regime into which the lead carer should be placed based on the age of the youngest child:

Age of the youngest child	Regime
Aged under 1	No Work-related Requirements
Aged 1	Work Focused Interview only • minimum of 3 monthly interventions
Aged 2	Work Preparation: • minimum monthly interviews • maximum Conditionality Earnings Threshold (CET) is set to 16 hours per week. • caring responsibilities must be taken into 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

Aged 3 and above where the lead carer is either not working or their earnings are below the Administrative Earnings Threshold	Intensive Work Search: • where the youngest child is aged between 3 and 12, the CET is set to a maximum 30 hours per week and availability and work-related activity are also set to a maximum of 30 hours per week (this can be tailored to a reduced number of hours depending on the claimant's circumstances) • all the claimant's circumstances must be considered when setting expected hours of work preparation, work search and work availability including: ○ work and commute to work ○ travel to and from the child's nursery or school ○ courses ○ voluntary work ○ health or disability ○ caring ○ available childcare This list is not exhaustive • the lead carer will be required to undertake weekly Work Search Interviews for the first 13 weeks
Aged 13 and above	Intensive Work Search • maximum CET is set to 35 hours per week • the work coach must also review the claimant's commitments and adjust the expected hours accordingly

Tailoring the Conditionality Earnings Threshold for lead carers with children below the age of 5

The Conditionality Earnings Threshold can be tailored instead of being manually overridden if a lead carer has one or more of the following:

- difficult travel time to a childcare provider, nursery or school (for example, poor public transport links when taking and collecting the child)
- a health condition
- part-time or temporary caring responsibilities for someone (for example, an elderly relative or a child where the claimant is not the lead carer)

- a lack of childcare availability in the claimant's residential area suitable for the needs of the child

For further information see:

Labour Market regimes and overrides
Expected hours of work-related activity
Availability for work

Tailoring travel to work time for parents with children

Travel to work time for lead carers of children must be proportionate to their expected hours and the following weekly work search requirements caps should apply:

- up to 10 hours: capped at 30 minutes
- 10 to 16 hours: capped at 60 minutes
- 17 hours and over: capped at 90 minutes

This is not a reduction in the Conditionality Earnings Threshold.

These caps can be varied further to take into account individual circumstances where there is a reasonable prospect of the lead carer gaining employment by reducing the travel to work time

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

To recognise that lead carers of children aged 2 to 4 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 could take a 6-month course to update their skills. The work search requirements can be adjusted to zero 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 and work plan. 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 1 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
- General Practitioners, 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.

Agents should be aware that foster carers are not subject to the same appointment frequency as lead carers of 1 year olds in the Work Focused Interview regime.

For more information, see Work Focused Interview regime: Characteristics and 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 abuse where a police report may be available
- experiencing or witnessing abuse or violence other than domestic abuse

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 account for, 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 six 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.