

## **Free Early Education and Childcare for children aged 2-4 years**

### **1. Free Early Years Entitlement for Three and Four Year Olds**

The Free Early Years Entitlement offers all 3 and 4 year old children up to 15 hours per week of free early education for 38 weeks of the year.

The free entitlement is divided into three terms each year.

In Sefton, the maximum number of free hours you can receive each term is:

|             |                       |                                      |
|-------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Spring term | (1st Jan - 31st Mar)  | 165 hours (15 hrs per week x 11 wks) |
| Summer term | (1st Apr - 31st Aug)  | 195 hours (15 hrs per week x 13 wks) |
| Autumn term | (1st Sept - 31st Dec) | 210 hours (15 hrs per week x 14 wks) |

#### **Children become eligible for the free entitlement from the term following their third birthday.**

Children whose 3rd birthday is between 1st January and 31st March are eligible from 1st April (Summer Term)

Children whose 3rd birthday is between 1st April and 31st August are eligible from 1st September (Autumn Term)

Children whose 3rd birthday is between 1st September and 31st December are eligible from 1st January (Spring Term)

### **What is early education?**

All early years providers have to meet government standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five. The standards are set out in a Statutory Framework called 'The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage'.

The Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum provides a range of activities in the following areas of learning:

- Personal, social and emotional development
- Communication and language
- Literacy
- Mathematical development
- Understanding of the world
- Physical development
- Expressive arts and design

### **How is the Free Entitlement offered?**

- The free entitlement can be taken between 7.00am and 7.00pm.
- The minimum number of hours that can be used in a day is 2 ½.
- The maximum number of hours that can be used in a day is 10.
- The maximum number of hours that can be used per week is 15.
- Your provider may be able to stretch the free entitlement over a longer period by reducing the number of free hours allocated to your child each week.

The way that the free entitlement is offered may vary from one setting to another. Please discuss your requirements with your chosen provider(s), as the level of flexibility that is offered will depend on their individual circumstances.

**You should not be charged any fees in relation to your free place.** However, you may be asked to pay for lunches, snacks or any other additional facilities that are provided. If you do not want to pay for meals you should be given the option of bringing a packed lunch.

If you need more than the free entitlement hours, you will have to pay for the additional childcare hours at the provider's normal hourly rate. Please ask your provider what the additional costs will be prior to taking up a free place – you should not be required to purchase extra hours or services in order to access the free entitlement.

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## How do I get a place?

A free place can be accessed in a variety of settings including pre-schools or playgroups, private day nurseries, private nursery schools, maintained nursery schools and classes, or with an accredited childminder network.

To obtain a list of Sefton's early years providers please contact Sefton Families Information Service on 0845 140 0845 or email [fis@sefton.gov.uk](mailto:fis@sefton.gov.uk) You can also contact the Families Information Service if you experience any problems accessing your child's free entitlement.

Your early years provider will claim funding from the Council for the free hours they give to your child. If your child is attending a nursery school or school nursery class, you will be given a school application form to complete. If your child is attending a private, voluntary or independent setting, you will be asked to complete a form at the start of each term which the provider will use to claim the funding.

## Can I claim the Free Entitlement in more than one setting?

If a child attends two settings it is possible to split the free entitlement between the settings, but you cannot claim for more than 15 hours per week in total.

Please speak with both settings to ensure they are happy with the hours you wish to split.

## Additional information about school based provision

In the autumn term, some schools stagger their intake of nursery children over a period of a couple of weeks. As the funding for your child's free entitlement will have been allocated to the school, it will not normally be possible for you to claim any free hours from a private nursery or childminder whilst you are waiting for the school place to start.

Taking the Free Entitlement in a school nursery class does not guarantee a place in that school when your child reaches the compulsory school age.

## Childcare Costs

Parents may additionally be able to receive help with childcare costs through the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit (WTC), but cannot claim this tax credit for the time their child is in receipt of free nursery education. The responsibility for claiming WTC rests with parents and not with providers. For further information call the WTC Helpline on 0845 300 3900.

### **2. Two Year Old Offer**

In addition to the three and four year old free part-time early education places, some two year olds will also be eligible to receive 15 hours of early education, although strict criteria applies.

Two-year-olds are eligible if they are looked after by their Local Authority or if their family is eligible for free school meals. You are eligible for free school meals if you receive one of the following:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- support through Part 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Act
- the guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (but **not** Working Tax Credit) and have an annual income not over £16,190

Eligible families can take up their place the term after the child's 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday. Applications can be submitted prior to the child's second birthday.

In addition to the free education place there is family and parenting support and support to access training and employment. To find out more, contact your Health Visitor, nearest children's centre or early years provider. Alternatively you could contact Families First on 0151 933 6021. Full eligibility criteria and application forms can also be downloaded at: [www.sefton.gov.uk/childcare](http://www.sefton.gov.uk/childcare)

For further details please contact us on 0845 140 0845 or email [fis@sefton.gov.uk](mailto:fis@sefton.gov.uk)

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