

Benefits for families with more than 2 children before 6 April 2026

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The rules and exceptions that apply if you had more than 2 children before 6 April 2026 and claimed Universal Credit.

The 2-child limit ended on 6 April 2026

If you get Universal Credit, you could get an extra amount to help support your children if they normally live with you.

Universal Credit now pays the extra amount for every child, no matter how many children you have.

The rules on the benefit cap stay the same. Additional Universal Credit payments for each child will count towards the benefit cap. This means that if your total benefits go over the benefit cap amounts for your circumstances, the increase in your Universal Credit may be limited.

Before 6 April 2026, the extra amount for children only applied to your first and second child, unless an exception applied.

This guidance explains the rules and exceptions that apply if you claimed Universal Credit and had more than 2 children before 6 April 2026.

Overview of the rules and exceptions before 6 April 2026

If you were already getting benefits for more than 2 children, you'll continue to get those benefits.

Before 6 April 2026, you will not be paid an additional amount for more than 2 children, unless the children were born before 6 April 2017 or special circumstances, known as 'exceptions' apply.

By child (or qualifying young person) we mean anyone aged under 16, or a young person aged under 20 who enrolled on, accepted or started full-time non-advanced education, such as A-levels, or approved training before they turned 19.

If you've already claimed Universal Credit

If you claimed Universal Credit in the previous 6 months but it was stopped for a period of time, you'll get the same support if you re-claimed, as long as you remained responsible for the same children and your circumstances remain the same.

If you become responsible for another child

You should report the birth of a child in the usual way for Universal Credit so that we can decide if an additional amount can be paid.

In general, you'll be entitled to an additional amount for any child or qualifying young person born before 6 April 2017.

If you have another child who is not living with you when you claim Universal Credit, but then returns to your household, you'll be entitled to a child amount for them, if they were born before 6 April 2017.

If this happens and you're being paid Child Tax Credit or Universal Credit for a child born after 6 April 2017, then you may not get Child Tax Credit or Universal Credit for that child unless an exception applies.

If you're responsible for a child or children through adoption or as part of non-parental caring arrangement, then you'll be able to receive an additional amount for these children. This will not affect any amounts you may get for any other children in your household. You'll need to provide documents to support this.

If you made a new claim

If you made a new claim, Universal Credit will pay an additional amount for all children born before 6 April 2017.

If you have been getting support for children in Universal Credit, Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance in the last 6 months, you will continue to get the child amount for the same number of children, as long as you remain responsible for the same children.

This protection will also be maintained through family formation changes, such as splitting from a partner in a joint claim, or coupling to form a new joint claim.

Exceptions (special circumstances) that applied in a previous award of Universal Credit, Child Tax Credit, Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance will continue to apply in your new Universal Credit award, unless the conditions for that exception are no longer met.

If you are entitled to an award of an existing benefit that includes a Severe Disability Premium, or have been entitled to an award of an existing benefit within the last month that included a Severe Disability Premium, and have continued to meet the Severe Disability Premium eligibility conditions, you cannot currently claim Universal Credit.

You should, if eligible, claim other benefits or remain on your existing benefits until you are told to claim Universal Credit.

Use a benefits calculator to check what benefits you could get if you cannot currently claim Universal Credit.

Special circumstances

We call these special circumstances, exceptions.

You may be able to get the additional child amount for a third or subsequent child or qualifying young person (you are responsible for) born on or after 6 April 2017 if the child or children:

- were born as part of a multiple birth
- were born as a result of a non-consensual conception (including rape) or conceived when you were in a controlling or coercive relationship

If you're responsible for a child or children (regardless of the order they joined the household) who:

- are adopted from local council care
- are in your care, either formally or informally and it's likely they would otherwise be looked after by a local council
- are a child of your child

Then you'll receive an additional amount for them and this will not affect any amounts you may get for any other children in your household.

For all of the exceptions above, you'll need to provide us with supporting documents.

Multiple birth

You can get extra Universal Credit and Child Tax Credit for your third and subsequent children if they're born as part of a multiple birth, apart from one child in that birth. This means the exception applies to the additional children in that birth.

Where the first child of the multiple birth is either the first or second child in the household, we'll pay a child amount for all the children born as part of the multiple birth. This means you can get an additional amount for that child (the first child) as well as the other child or children of the multiple birth.

Adopted from local council care

This exception applies to a child or children adopted from local council care. You'll be able to receive an additional amount from the date you become responsible for them, rather than the date the child was born.

This exception does not apply if:

- children are adopted from abroad
- you or your partner are, or were the step-parent of the adopted child before they were adopted

Since 28 November 2018, the policy for when we'll pay for children in non-parental caring arrangements or who are adopted has changed. More information about these changes is available.

Children living with friends or family under caring arrangements

This includes:

- formal caring arrangements, such as a Child Arrangements Order, a Guardianship Order
- informal caring arrangements if it's likely the child would otherwise be looked after by a local council, supporting documents will be required using the informal care form

If you're caring for a child and either you or your partner are the parent or step-parent of that child, you will not get an additional child amount for them unless either:

- they are your first or second child

- the child was born before 6 April 2017

If a child you're responsible for has a child of their own, you'll also get the extra child amount for the 'child of your child' until either your:

- child turns 16 and claims benefit on their own
- child leaves the household, leaving their child in your care

If your child leaves the household but their child stays in your care, you'll no longer be able to claim this exception, but you may be able to claim for their child under the non-parental caring arrangements exception.

This also applies to the child of a qualifying young person for tax credits.

Since 28 November 2018, the policy for when we'll pay for children in non-parental caring arrangements or who are adopted has changed. More information about these changes is available.

Non-consensual conception

You may be able to get the additional child amount for a third or subsequent child if either:

- your child was born as a result of a non-consensual conception (including rape)
- you were in a controlling or coercive relationship with the other biological parent of the child at the time of the conception

To get the additional child amount of benefit for this reason you must not be living with the other (biological) parent of the child.

If you do not already have documents to support this special circumstance, you'll need to fill in the 'Support for a child conceived without your consent' form with the help of an approved third party.

Find out which approved third parties are available.

DWP, HMRC and local council staff will not question you about the circumstances of the conception, any information you provide will be kept confidential.

If you're eligible to receive the additional amount for your child, the reason for the exception will not appear in any benefit letters.

More information about support for children in Universal Credit

Read more information about:

- support for a maximum of 2 children in Universal Credit

- support for a maximum of 2 children in Child Tax Credit

You'll still be entitled to additional support in respect of any disabled children, regardless of the total number of children in your household.

You may still be entitled to help with childcare costs for any of your children, even if you do not get the additional child amount for all of your children.

'Passported' benefits, for example, free school meals for children will not be affected.

You should continue to report the birth of a child and any changes in your circumstances involving children or young people, so you do not miss out on what you are entitled to.

Changes to tax credits claims should be reported to HMRC, changes to Universal Credit and other benefits should be reported to DWP.

Qualifying young person

Generally, a qualifying young person is someone aged 16 to 19 who is in education or training.

A qualifying young person is someone aged over 16 in any of these situations:

- in full time education or not - from their 16th birthday until 31 August following that birthday
- if enrolled in, or accepted for approved training or a course of education which is non-advanced education - up to 31 August following their 19th birthday

The approved training or course must be provided at a school, college or elsewhere approved by a qualifying body.

The average time spent during term time in tuition, practical work, supervised study or taking exams must be more than 12 hours a week. Meal breaks and unsupervised study are not counted. Where the qualifying young person is aged 19, the education or training must have begun before they reached their 19th birthday, or they must have been enrolled to undertake that education or training before reaching that age.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claiming-benefits-for-2-or-more-children>