

TIPS FOR CLAIMING DLA

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers



Tips for claiming Disability Living Allowance

It typically costs three times more to raise a disabled child. Claiming Disability Living Allowance (DLA) can help cover some of the additional expense you might incur from things like higher heating bills, therapies, extra childcare, repairs and replacing damaged clothes and property, specialist equipment, diets, transport costs, or endless laundry.

Many parents find it hard to juggle paid work with the uncertain nature of their child's health or mental health and unpredictable levels of school attendance. There are lots of reasons to claim DLA but many of you tell us it's hard to know how to make a strong case. This fact sheet offers lots of tips that can help you with claiming DLA. We also produce a companion fact sheet called *What is DLA?* See below for details.

Prepare well

Always order a paper claim pack from DWP. Get the form from the DLA Helpline on 0800 121 4600 as it will be date stamped and, as long as you return it within six weeks, your claim will be considered from that date. Online claims are only considered from the date you submit them and you are likely to spend weeks working on getting it right.

Gather evidence that supports what you say to send with the form: medical reports, assessments, advices and EHC Plans are all useful. Be wary of school reports, they are written to be shared with your child and so are usually very positive. SEN support plans are often better at reflecting the challenges your child must manage at school; your child's school might call this an Individual Education Plan, a Provision Map, or a Pupil Profile. If school has made a referral to the local Child Development Centre or CAMHS, ask for a copy of that too. Specialist SEN advisory teachers are also a useful source of supporting information. If you live in Brighton & Hove these practitioners work with BHISS, if you are in East Sussex, they are part of the Education East Sussex team. If you have mislaid any reports, ask advice givers to send more copies. If your child is overdue any sort of reassessment, chase this up!

Assessments you have paid for yourself carry the same weight as those commissioned from other sources. Many health and mental health practitioners work partly in private practice and partly for a local authority or NHS trust. They all work to the same professional standards. In fact, independent assessments are likely to be more in-depth and include more recommendations and sources of further help.

Read through all the paperwork you have gathered about your child. Clinic letters and assessments often shine a torch on difficulties we, as parents, find hard to name or explain.

If your child is awake at night, keep a sleep/wake diary for a week or two before you claim. Show it to your child's GP or teacher and include it with your claim. Have you asked your GP for help to manage your tiredness or your child's disturbed nights? Does your child fall asleep or become irritable at school in the afternoons? Can their teacher link this to reports of poor sleeping in a home schoolbook? It helps if others can say you report broken nights. It is always worth telling anyone assessing your child if they are awake at night. Always check clinic letters as soon as you get them to be sure they reflect what you have said about your child's needs at night.

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Make it a top priority. Be prepared to spend several days on this. Awards are worth a lot and DLA is a passport benefit to other allowances, premiums, and sources of financial help.

It's hard to tackle alone, so ask a friend to help. Other parents who have children with similar problems can be a great source of information about what to say and what not to say.

Make the best use of professionals

Name the most relevant practitioner on the claim pack. This might be the most senior, perhaps a consultant, a key worker who co-ordinates services or someone like a speech and language therapist, physiotherapist or specialist nurse who sees your child most frequently. If there are a myriad of specialist education, health or social care professionals, list them all on another sheet.

Make use of the written evidence you already have. Practitioners are all very busy and you may have to wait weeks for an extra letter that you do not need. If you already have assessments, diagnoses or clinic letters, it makes better sense to list and treasury tag these documents into the claim pack alongside that page.

Only ask for a supporting statement from a professional if you have no other written evidence. If this practitioner has only seen your child in a clinic or school setting, make sure they aren't guessing how things are at home. Many children 'mask' away from home, so explain what happens before and after school and at the school gates. It helps to offer a summary of your key concerns. If they are writing on the claim pack drop it off and pick it up yourself. Don't trust the post, as this is your only copy and you've invested a lot of time on it. Better still, ask for them to put their assessment on headed paper.

DWP do not, as a rule have the resources to contact health professionals. So, try to include written evidence from anyone you name.

DWP may may contact your child's school or nursery. If you do not include details of the extra help they get in their education setting, this can be seen as a 'weak link'.

How to complete the form

The DLA claim pack is laid out in columns and is hard to navigate. There are few opportunities to include extra information. So it is easy to be misled into thinking that you do not have to write much and that ticking the boxes will be enough. This is not the case. For most children, especially those with invisible impairments, it's really important to include as much detail as possible, and far more than will fit onto one side of A4 paper at the back of the claim pack.

Tick the small boxes on every page and fill in all the pages even if it is just to tick 'No' or to put a 0 in the boxes.

We strongly advise you include extra notes. Explain what is challenging for you and your child about any tricky aspect of their day. This might be practical hands-on help. Equally important though is the extra time, patience or creativity it takes to win your child's co-operation. When there is plenty to say, we suggest you attach extra pages as handwritten notes or better still, as a typed document.

Describe what happens at the dinner table, in the bath, at bedtime, out shopping, on public transport and so on. Say exactly what help or supervision you give and say what would happen if your child didn't get the help they needed. Include anecdotes that illustrate the problems.





Don't underestimate the help your child needs: it's easy to forget what other children of the same age as your child can do for themselves, so make comparisons between younger siblings or friends and your disabled child.

Write about the bad days even if it feels very personal and hard to share. If you gloss over difficult times, your child's behaviour can be almost guaranteed to deteriorate the day after you post the claim, and you'll wish you had been more open.

Lots of things count as aids and adaptations, so think out of the box. While we automatically think of major buggies, specialist seating systems and standing frames, Dexcom monitors, Flocare infinity pumps, visual timetables, MAKATON symbols and PECS cards, chewies, fidget toys, social stories and trampolines can count.

Don't forget that glasses and hearing aids are equipment too. How often are they lost, mislaid, need adjusting, repairing, or cleaning?

Don't worry about repetition: common threads running through your claim are important.

Write little and often: It can feel more manageable if you just aim to answer a few questions a day.

Label any extra pages with your child's name and date of birth at the top of each page in case they come adrift.

Afterwards

Keep a photocopy of your claim; you will need to refer to it if you want a decision looked at again or when the claim is reviewed. Never send originals of reports or assessments, only photocopies.

Send it Special Delivery, to be sure your claim arrives safely. Even then, claims can be lost in the system at DWP. Another reason to photocopy absolutely everything you send.

If you disagree with the decision, act quickly. Don't give up if your claim is refused. The DWP doesn't always get it right, but timescales are short, so act quickly if you want a recent decision to be looked at again. Over 50% of these decisions are overturned, so ask for the decision to be reviewed. If it is still refused, you can go to appeal. Have a look at our fact sheet '*DLA Reconsiderations and Appeals*', details below.

DLA Reviews

Review or renewal packs are sent out five months before a current award ends. This gives you plenty of time to gather evidence to support your claim.

Get your review pack back in good time. The DWP takes at least 8 weeks to make a decision so make sure you're not without money while your claim is assessed.

Work just as hard on the review as you did on the original claim. The DWP don't just rubber stamp reviews, even for severely disabled children.





Ask about

- **Support from Amaze** - Amaze offers free online workshops and written resources to help you make a successful DLA claim. If you face additional challenges, we may be able to offer you more targeted support. Call Amaze on 01273 772289 or email sendiass@amazesussex.org.uk. Visit <https://amazesussex.org.uk/benefits-advice>
- **Citizen's Advice** can give help with benefits claims. Call 08082 787815 (Brighton & Hove) or visit www.cabrightonhove.org. For East Sussex, visit www.citizensadviceeastsussex.org.uk to get the local number for your area.
- **DLA Benefits helpline** - call 0800 121 4600 for general help and advice on DLA
- **HARC (Hastings Advice and Representation Centre) Benefits Advice Line** - If you live in East Sussex you can get free advice and support with DLA and PIP claims from application to appeal. Contact their Welfare Benefits Helpline on 0333 344 0681 or their general advice line on 01424 428375. Email benefitseastsussex@harcuk.com or visit <https://harcuk.com>
- **Money Advice Plus** can offer advice and support with debt and benefits if you live in Brighton & Hove. Call 0300 304 8004, email maw@moneyadviceplus.org.uk or visit www.moneyadviceplus.org.uk
- **Transport help** - You may be able to get a Blue Badge or a disabled parking bay outside your house. Visit www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/parking-and-travel/parking/blue-badge-scheme-and-disabled-parking or www.eastsussex.gov.uk/social-care/blue-badges. Or you may use the mobility component of your PIP or DLA award to lease a car or scooter via the **Motability** scheme. Call 0300 456 4566 or visit www.motability.co.uk

Further reading and useful links

- **'What is DLA?' and 'DLA Reconsiderations and Appeals'** - Download our companion Amaze fact sheets at amazesussex.org.uk/resources/fact-sheets
- **Disability Living Allowance (DLA) overview** - <https://www.gov.uk/disability-living-allowance-children>

