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Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

Helping you understand, apply for, and manage your DLA claim.

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1. What is Disability Living Allowance (DLA)?

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is a benefit provided by the UK government to help with the extra costs of caring for a child who has a disability or long-term health condition. It is designed to support families whose children need more care, supervision, or help getting around than other children of the same age.

DLA is only for children under 16. Once a young person turns 16, they will usually move to Personal Independence Payment (PIP) instead. The benefit is not means-tested, which means your income, savings, or employment status do not affect whether you can claim it.

The amount you receive depends on how your child's condition affects their daily life and mobility, not on the name of their diagnosis. This includes both physical and hidden disabilities such as autism, ADHD, anxiety, or sensory processing differences.

Receiving DLA can help ease some of the financial pressure of supporting a disabled child.

Families often use it to help cover:

- Travel costs to medical or therapy appointments
- Extra clothing, equipment, or sensory aids
- Support for after-school care or respite services
- Additional costs linked to routines, supervision, or managing behaviour

Applying for DLA can seem daunting, but with the right guidance and examples, it becomes much easier to show how your child's needs differ from other children their age.

2. Who Can Claim DLA?

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is designed for **children under the age of 16** who need extra help with personal care, supervision, or mobility because of a disability or long-term health condition.

To qualify, a child must:

- **Be under 16 years old**
- **Live in the UK** and meet certain residence and immigration conditions
- **Have had difficulties for at least 3 months,** and these difficulties are expected to continue for at least another 6 months
- **Need more care or supervision than other children of the same age**

It's important to remember that DLA is awarded based on **how a child's condition affects their daily life**, not the diagnosis itself. For example, two children with autism might have very different support needs. One may need constant supervision for safety, while another may need help managing routines or social interactions.

Parents, guardians, or carers usually apply for DLA **on behalf of the child.** If the child lives away from home (for example, in residential school or shared care), DWP will decide who should receive the payment depending on who provides most of their day-to-day support.

DLA can be awarded for a wide range of conditions, including:

- Autism and ADHD
- Learning disabilities
- Physical disabilities
- Long-term health conditions (such as epilepsy, diabetes, or chronic pain)
- Mental health conditions (such as anxiety or depression)

Even if your child's needs vary from day to day, or if they have good and bad days, they may still qualify.

The key is to describe **what help they need most of the time**, rather than how they cope on their best days.

3. The Two Components of DLA

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is made up of two parts, called components. A child may receive one or both components, depending on their needs:

The Care Component

This part of DLA helps if your child needs extra personal care, supervision, or support compared to other children of the same age.

This could include help with:

- Washing, dressing, or toileting
- Eating and drinking
- Taking medication or managing medical treatments
- Staying safe at home or outside
- Support with routines, reassurance, or emotional regulation

The Care Component is paid at **three different rates**, depending on the level of help needed:

Rate	When it applies
Lowest	The child needs help for some of the day.
Middle	The child needs frequent help or supervision during the day, or help at night
Highest	The child needs help or supervision throughout both day and night, or they are terminally ill.

The Mobility Component

This part helps if your child needs extra support getting around, either because they have difficulty walking or because they need supervision to stay safe outdoors.

This could include:

- Physical difficulties with walking, balance, or fatigue
- Behavioural or sensory challenges that make travelling unsafe
- Needing guidance or someone to accompany them on unfamiliar routes

The Mobility Component has two rates:

Rate	When it applies
Lowest	The child can walk but needs guidance or supervision outdoors.
Highest	The child has severe physical difficulties with walking, or other significant mobility limitations.

Each component is assessed separately, so your child may qualify for one but not the other.

For example, an autistic child might not have physical mobility difficulties but may still qualify for the **Lower Rate Mobility Component** if they need constant supervision when outdoors to stay safe.

Your child's award is based on **how their needs affect them most of the time**, not just on occasional or severe episodes. Be as detailed as possible when describing what help they need day to day.

4. How to Apply

Applying for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) can feel overwhelming at first, but taking it one step at a time makes it much easier. The key is to give a **clear and honest picture** of your child's needs, showing how their daily life differs from that of other children their age.

1 Getting the Application Form

You can apply for DLA by:

- Calling the DLA helpline to request a paper form (recommended, as it can backdate your claim to the date you phoned).
- Downloading the form online from GOV.UK and printing it yourself.

Once you've received the form, you'll usually have six weeks to complete and return it.

2 What You'll Need

Before starting the form, gather as much information as you can about your child's needs. Helpful items include:

- Details of your child's **diagnoses and health conditions**
- **Reports or letters** from doctors, therapists, or schools
- Your child's **Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)** (if they have one)
- A **daily routine or care diary** showing the support they need
- Information about **any treatments, aids, or equipment** they use

Having these details to hand can make completing the form much smoother.

3 Filling in the Form

Each section asks questions about how your child manages daily activities and mobility. When completing the form:

- **Be specific** – describe what help your child needs and why.
- **Use examples** – talk about what happens on a typical day, not just their best days.
- **Include safety concerns** – for example, if your child is at risk of harm without supervision.
- **Avoid medical jargon** – use everyday language that clearly shows the impact on daily life.
- **Be honest but realistic** – it's about showing needs, not strengths.

Remember, DWP assessors don't know your child. The more detail you include, the better they can understand their challenges.

5. Gathering Evidence

Good evidence can make a real difference to your Disability Living Allowance (DLA) application.

It helps the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) understand your child's needs in a clear, factual way and supports what you've written on the form.

You don't have to send every document you own — focus on **evidence that shows the level of care, supervision, or mobility support your child needs** on a daily basis.

Types of Helpful Evidencein the Form

Include documents that show how your child's condition affects them in everyday life, such as:

- **Medical letters or reports** from your GP, paediatrician, or specialist
- **Therapy reports** from occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, or psychologists
- **Education, Health and Care Plan** (EHCP) or **school support plan**
- **School reports or letters** describing the extra help or adjustments your child needs
- **Care plans** from social services or respite providers
- **Medication lists** or t**reatment summaries**
- **Letters from support workers or voluntary organisations** who know your child well

If a professional hasn't seen your child recently, you can ask them for an updated letter explaining your child's current needs.

Real Life Examples

Use clear, everyday examples to show what happens in real situations:

> “Jamie needs help getting dressed every morning because they find buttons and labels uncomfortable. It takes around 20 minutes longer than for their peers.”
>
> “When we go out, I always hold Mia’s hand as she can run into the road without warning if something catches her attention.”

These personal stories can be more powerful than long reports.

6. Decision and Payment

Once you've sent your Disability Living Allowance (DLA) form and supporting evidence to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), your application will be reviewed by a **DLA Decision Maker.** They will look at all the information you've provided to decide whether your child qualifies and at what rate.

You won't normally need a face-to-face assessment for DLA, but the DWP may contact you or one of your child's professionals if they need more details.

How long it takes

It can take several weeks — sometimes up to 12 weeks or more — for a decision to be made.

During this time, make sure you:

- Keep copies of everything you send
- Record the date you posted your form
- Let DWP know if your child's condition changes
-

If the DWP needs more information, they'll contact you directly.

The Decision Letter

When the decision is made, you'll receive a letter explaining:

- Whether your child has been awarded DLA
- Which components (Care and/or Mobility) they qualify for
- The rate for each component
- How long the award will last

Some awards are made for a fixed period, after which you'll need to reapply. Others are indefinite, meaning there's no set end date (though reviews can still happen).

If you disagree with the decision, don't worry — there are options to ask for a review or appeal (see Section 7).

Payments

If your claim is successful, DLA is paid every four weeks, directly into your bank account.

In some cases, it can be backdated to the date you first requested the form — another reason it's best to apply by phone.

The money can be used however best supports your child's needs, such as:

- Extra childcare or respite
- Transport to appointments
- Specialist clothing or sensory equipment
- Support for social or community activities

There are no rules on how DLA must be spent — it's there to help your family manage the extra costs of your child's condition.

Changes in Circumstances

If your child's condition or care needs change — for better or worse — you must let the DWP know.

This includes:

- Major changes in mobility or independence
- Starting or stopping medication
- Moving home or changing school
- Hospital stays longer than 28 days

These updates can affect the amount you receive or trigger a review of your claim.

7. If Your Application Is Refused

If your Disability Living Allowance (DLA) application is refused, or you're awarded a lower rate than expected, it can feel frustrating and disheartening especially when you know how much support your child needs.

Try not to give up. Many decisions are changed once more evidence is provided or when families ask for a review.

Step 1: Ask for a Mandatory Reconsideration

If you disagree with the decision, the first step is to request a **Mandatory Reconsideration (MR).**

This means the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will look at your claim again, including any new information you provide.

You must ask for this **within one month** of the date on your decision letter.

You can request it:

- **In writing** (recommended, so you have proof)
- **By phone**, followed by a written confirmation

When writing your request, explain **why you think the decision is wrong** and include:

- Any **new evidence** (e.g. updated letters, reports, or examples)
- Clear examples of your child's day-to-day needs
- Points you feel were **missed or misunderstood** by the decision-maker

Step 2: Appeal to an Independent Tribunal

If you're still unhappy after the Mandatory Reconsideration, you can appeal to an **independent tribunal.**

This is a separate panel, not part of the DWP, which will review your case fairly and make a new decision based on the evidence.

You can submit your appeal online or by post. You'll be asked if you want to:

- Attend a hearing (in person, by phone, or video) — this is usually recommended, as you can explain your child's needs directly.
- Have the case decided on paper — this may be quicker, but you won't be able to answer questions.

Many families win their appeal once they have the opportunity to explain their child's situation in more detail.

Tip: Keep Copies and Stay Organised

When challenging a decision, it's important to:

- Keep copies of every form, letter, and piece of evidence
- Write down dates of phone calls and who you spoke to
- File all paperwork in one place for easy reference

This helps you stay prepared if you need to attend a hearing or provide updates later.

Remember

A refusal doesn't mean your child isn't entitled it often means the DWP didn't have enough clear evidence or examples to understand their needs.

With the right support and detailed information, many decisions are successfully overturned.

8. When your child turns 16

When your child turns 16, their Disability Living Allowance (DLA) will usually end, and they will need to apply for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) instead.

This is part of a planned transition from one benefit to another — it doesn't mean your child will lose their support, but it does mean you'll need to complete a new application.

The Transition from DLA to PIP

A few months before your child's 16th birthday, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will write to you explaining what will happen next.

The letter will invite your child to apply for PIP. You'll need to respond by the deadline given if you don't, their DLA payments could stop.

Although the two benefits are similar, PIP has different criteria and looks at how your child's condition affects them as a young person moving into adulthood.

Who Makes the PIP Claim?

At 16, the claim must be made in your child's name, but you can still be involved in the process.

If your child needs help managing their benefits, you can apply to become their **appointee**, which means you can continue to fill in forms, talk to DWP, and manage payments on their behalf.

You can apply for appointeeship before or during the transition the DWP will arrange a short meeting to confirm it's appropriate.

An **appointee** is someone officially authorised by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to manage another person's benefits when they are unable to do so themselves. For young people aged 16 or over, this means a parent, carer, or guardian can continue to:

- Fill in benefit forms
- Speak to DWP on their behalf
- Receive and manage payments safely

The DWP will arrange a short meeting to confirm that an appointee is needed and that the person chosen is suitable.

Having an appointee helps ensure your child's benefits are handled correctly, while still involving them in decisions as much as possible.

Preparing for the Change

You can help make the transition easier by:

- Keeping copies of your child's DLA form and evidence
- Updating reports and medical letters to reflect their current needs
- Talking with your child about the change and what to expect
- Contacting ASD Helping Hands for support with the new PIP application

Remember, your child's DLA will continue until a decision on their PIP claim is made, as long as you apply within the given timeframe.

Continuing Support

This change is a good opportunity to review your child's needs and ensure they are getting the right help as they move toward adulthood.

Many young people who received DLA continue to qualify for PIP — often at a similar or higher rate — once their full needs are reassessed.

ASD Helping Hands can guide you through this process, explaining the differences between DLA and PIP, helping you complete the new forms, and preparing for any assessments.

9. Useful Contacts and Resources

It's always helpful to know where to turn for advice, updates, or extra support. Below are key organisations and services that can help you with Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and related issues.

ASD Helping Hands

We offer one-to-one support with DLA forms, evidence gathering, and appeals. Our team can guide you through the process from start to finish and help you understand any decisions.

🌐 Website: www.asdhelpinghands.org.uk
📧 Email: contact@asdhelpinghands.org.uk
📞 Phone: 01362 685860

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

For DLA claim forms, updates on applications, and reporting changes.

📞 Helpline: 0800 121 4600
📠 Textphone: 0800 121 4523
🌐 Website: www.gov.uk/disability-living-allowance-children

Citizens Advice

Free, independent advice about benefits, appeals, and financial support.

🌐 Website: www.citizensadvice.org.uk
📞 Local offices can be found through the website search tool.

NHS and GP Services

Your child's GP, paediatrician, or therapist can provide medical reports or supporting letters for your claim.
Ask for updates if your child's needs have changed.

Local Authority SEND Services

Contact your local council for information on Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), short breaks, or disability-related support.

🌐 Visit your council's website and search "SEND" or "Disability Services."

ASD Helping Hands

Our Mission

"Empowering autistic individuals and those around them, ASD Helping Hands is dedicated to fostering confidence, independence, and inclusion at every stage of life. We provide guidance, education, and resources to help individuals, families, and professionals navigate autism with knowledge and empowerment.

We champion the rights of autistic people, striving to create a more inclusive society while ensuring our services remain accessible, reliable, and built on trust."

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