

# Support for arranging child maintenance

Help and where  
to find out more

# Get your child maintenance sorted

For free, impartial information and support,  
contact Child Maintenance Options today.



Online

[www.cmoptions.org/support](http://www.cmoptions.org/support)



Phone

0800 988 0988

Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm,  
Saturday 9am to 4pm.

## Planning ahead

If you're bringing up a child and they have a parent who doesn't live with them, putting a child maintenance arrangement in place can make a real difference to the lives of the children involved.

### What is child maintenance?

Child maintenance is a regular, reliable payment that helps towards a child's everyday living costs. Usually the parent without the main day-to-day care of the child pays child maintenance to the other parent.

You can arrange these payments in several ways, and it's important to choose the best option for your situation.

### Why is child maintenance important?

Child maintenance can make a big difference to children's wellbeing, helping them get more choices and opportunities in life. What's more, parents have a legal duty to support their children financially, even if they do not live with them.

### How does child maintenance affect benefits?

The way child maintenance affects benefits has changed. In the past, parents with the main day-to-day care who were on benefits had to apply through the Child Support Agency, and any child maintenance they got would reduce their benefits.

But now you can choose how you arrange child maintenance even if you're on benefits. Also, any child maintenance you get will not affect your income-related benefits, so you may be better off.

## What are my child maintenance options?

You can arrange child maintenance in three ways:

### **Make a private agreement**

If you think you can sort out maintenance between yourselves, you could make a private agreement. It's quick and easy to set up, and can be flexible because there are no set rules. The agreement will not usually be legally binding though, and could fail if either parent isn't honest about their situation.

### **Use the Child Support Agency**

The Child Support Agency is the government's child maintenance service. You can ask them to work out child maintenance for you and they can collect and enforce payments too. You don't have to be in contact with the other parent or even know where they live.

### **Use the courts**

In England and Wales, you can get a Consent Order – this is an official ruling made by the courts, normally used when parents are deciding a divorce settlement. Both parents work with solicitors to agree the amount of child maintenance to be paid. It's legally binding and can be expensive because of the legal fees involved.

In Scotland, you can make a private agreement into a contract called a Minute of Agreement. This can be registered to make it legally binding.

## Help and information

For more information about these options, there's a free information and support service called Child Maintenance Options.

Child Maintenance Options is completely impartial and open to anyone who wants to understand more about child maintenance, including your family and friends.

### The free service can help you to:

- understand the options for making a child maintenance arrangement if you don't already have one
- deal with other issues linked to child maintenance, such as housing, work, money and emotional wellbeing
- get in touch with other useful organisations that offer specialist advice.

To make the right choices about child maintenance for your child, visit the Child Maintenance Options website for tools, leaflets and information, or phone the Options team to talk about your situation.



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## Textphones

If you have a textphone because you can't speak or hear clearly, there are different numbers for each service listed in this leaflet. These numbers don't accept voice calls or text messages from mobile phones.



Textphone  
**0800 988 0988**

## Call charges

Calls to 0800 numbers are free from BT land lines but you may have to pay more if you use another phone company, a mobile phone, or if you are calling from abroad.

Calls from mobile phones can cost up to 40p a minute, so check the cost of calls with your service provider. Charges were correct as of the date below.

This leaflet is only a guide and does not cover every circumstance. We have done our best to make sure the leaflet is correct as of the date below. Some of the information may be oversimplified or may become inaccurate over time, for example because of changes to the law. We recommend that you get independent advice before making financial decisions based on this leaflet.

