

Understanding The DLA For Children

Horsham Matters Resource Guide

Version 2 | September 2026

What is DLA?

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is a non-means-tested benefit for children under 16 who have additional care or mobility needs due to a disability or health condition. It is paid every four weeks by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and is made up of two components. A child might qualify for one or both components.

Entitlement to DLA is not based on a diagnosis alone. Instead, it looks at the extra help, supervision, or support a child requires compared to other children of the same age without additional needs.

Who can Claim?

Your child may qualify if they:

- Are under 16 and live in England or Wales
- Have had difficulties for at least 3 months and expect them to continue for at least 6 months (unless they are terminally ill)
- Need substantially more care, supervision or help getting around than a child of the same age without a disability
- Have lived in the UK for at least 2 of the last 3 years and not subject to immigration control.

The Two Components of DLA

DLA is made up of two parts:

1. Care Component

Awarded if a child needs extra help with personal care or supervision from the ages of 3 months to 15 years. (Before the child's 16th birthday.)

There are three rates:

Lowest Rate Care	Needs help for a significant part of the day with personal care or needs supervision to keep them safe
Middle Rate Care	Either needs frequent help or supervision throughout the day, prolonged or repeated help at night, or needs someone awake at night to watch over them
Highest Rate Care	Meets both daytime and night-time conditions for middle rate

2. Mobility Component

Awarded if a child has difficulty walking or getting around.

There are two rates:

Lower Rate Mobility	Needs guidance or supervision outdoors (Awarded from age 5+ years)
Higher Rate Mobility	Cannot walk, or walking is severely limited Walking would endanger their life or health Has severe visual impairment

Understanding Severe Mental Impairment (SMI)

Severe Mental Impairment is a specific test used to qualify for Higher Rate Mobility.

A child may qualify under SMI if they:

1. Are entitled to the Highest Rate Care component
2. Have a severe impairment of intelligence and social functioning
3. Exhibit disruptive behaviour which is 'extreme'
4. Must frequently need another person to step in and physically restrain them to prevent harm to themselves, injury to others, or damage to property.
5. Behaviour must be so unpredictable that they need someone to be present and always supervise them while they are awake.

Evidence that helps a Claim

Supporting evidence can include:

- Medical reports (GP, consultant, paediatrician)
- Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP)
- Evidence of extra support needed in school for SEN
- Letters from therapists or specialists
- A detailed description of difficulties and support needs
- Examples of accidents, risks, meltdowns, or supervision needs

How Much is DLA?

DLA rates change each April. The amount paid depends on whether one or both components are awarded and which rate is awarded. The current rate is:

DLA Component	April 2025 - 2026	April 2026-2027
Lowest Rate Care	£29.20	£30.30
Middle Rate Care	£73.90	£76.70
Highest Rate Care	£110.40	£114.60
Lower Rate Mobility	£29.20	£30.30
Higher Rate Mobility	£77.05	£80.00

How DLA Can Affect Other Benefits

DLA is non-means tested and not taxable. Therefore, it does not have a negative effect on other benefits. DLA may increase entitlement to:

- Carer's Allowance and/or Universal Credit Carer Element
- Universal Credit Child Disability Element
- Blue Badge
- Motability Scheme (if higher rate mobility is awarded)

Claiming DLA: What To Expect

1. Request a claim form

To start a claim for DLA:

- Call the DLA helpline to request a form: 0800 121 4600 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm)
- Download the form from GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disability-living-allowance-for-children-claim-form>

We recommend calling for a paper form as the claim usually starts from the date you request the form (if returned within 6 weeks). If you download the form, and send it, your claim will start from the date they receive it.

2. Complete the Form

The form is detailed and is 40 pages long. It's important to:

- Compare your child to another child of the same age
- Describe your child's difficulties and support needs based on the majority of days.
- Give real examples
- Explain supervision and risks clearly
- Include supporting evidence

For more detailed guidance on filling out the form, please read the Horsham Matters Resource Guide - Completing the DLA Form.

3. Send the Form

Return the form with copies of any supporting documents. They provide a Free Post address: Freepost DWP DLA Child.

However, we recommend (if you can) to send the form by recorded delivery.

4. Decision

The DWP may:

- Make a decision based on the form and evidence provided
- Contact professionals
- Request further information
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You will receive a written decision letter explaining the outcome of the claim. At present, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) can take up to six months to assess an application and make a decision.

If DLA is awarded, payments will be backdated to the date the claim was made. Any money owed from that start date will be paid to you as a lump sum.

If you are unhappy with the decision, you can appeal by requesting a mandatory reconsideration and following the DWP appeals process. It is strongly recommended to get support from an advisor to help provide guidance with your appeal. For more information, see the Horsham Matters Resource Guide on DWP Appeals Process.

Many decisions are changed at reconsideration or appeal.

Remember: If you need help or further guidance with making a claim for DLA, speak with a member of our support team at Horsham Matters for a referral to an advisor.

Call or WhatsApp: 0300 124 0204

Email: support@horshammatters.org.uk

Helpful Links

- Horsham Matters – Support: <https://www.horsham-matters.org.uk/get-help-now/>
- DLA - Easy to read guide: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/easy-read-disability-living-allowance-dla-for-children>
- DLA - GOV UK Web page: <https://www.gov.uk/disability-living-allowance-children>
- Horsham Springboard: <https://www.springboardsupport.org/>
- Contact: <https://contact.org.uk/help-for-families/information-advice-services/>
- Family Fund Grant: <https://www.familyfund.org.uk/support/discover-more/support-for-families-with-disabled-children-family-fund/>
- Benefits calculator: <https://www.entitledto.co.uk/>
- DWP Challenge a decision: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/challenge-a-decision-made-by-the-department-for-work-and-pensions-dwp>
- Horsham District Council (HDC), Council Tax Support: <https://www.horsham.gov.uk/council-tax-and-benefits/council-tax/council-tax-support-discounts-and-exemptions>
- HDC – Apply for a Blue Badge: <https://www.horsham.gov.uk/parking/disabled-parking/apply-for-a-blue-badge>
- WSCC Disabled person's bus or railcard information and application form: https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/media/lizc4bq2/encts_disabled_application_form.pdf
- WSCC Household Support: <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/leisure-recreation-and-community/household-support-fund/>
- Carers Support West Sussex: <https://www.carerssupport.org.uk/>
- Prevention Assessment Team: <https://www.sussexcommunity.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/services/prevention-assessment-team>