

# What happens to a parent's benefits if their child is taken into care?

A step by step guide on how benefits will be affected and how you can advise.



**One Parent  
Families Scotland**  
*changing lives, challenging poverty*



**the promise**  
scotland

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# About the practitioner guide and how to use it

This guide is for all **practitioners from statutory and voluntary agencies** working with families. It aims to prevent, mitigate, and inform families of the financial and material changes that will affect them if their children become looked after, or when they return home after being in care.

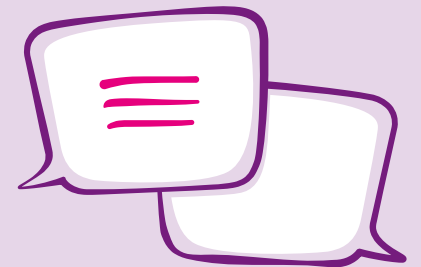
The guide explains the financial impact on families so that practitioners have the information they need to support families and improve outcomes.

## **We suggest that you:**

- read the information about poverty awareness to enhance your existing knowledge
- refer to the checklists and guidance for the relevant stage of your contact with a family

## **The guide describes three main stages when there may be financial implications:**

1. Initial support and children on the edges of care
2. Children looked after away from home
3. Reunification



# Poverty awareness

## What is poverty

“Poverty affects millions of the families in the UK. Poverty means not being able to heat your home, pay your rent, or buy the essentials for your children. It means waking up every day facing insecurity, uncertainty, and impossible decisions about money. It means facing marginalisation – and even discrimination – because of your financial circumstances. The constant stress it causes can lead to problems that deprive the families of the chance to play a full part in society.”

*(Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2022)*

## Why consider poverty in your work practice

Being poverty aware can improve your practice. The people you are in contact with may respond to poverty by becoming anxious, withdrawn, depressed, angry, or hopeless. But individuals and communities can also be resolute, proud, resilient, and resourceful. This is often overlooked. When you are trying to understand the effects of poverty on someone’s life and actions, you need to consider not only their ‘failure’ to participate and the consequences of this, but also their successes in organising limited resources to participate.

## Your practice is improved through:

- **compliance:** many of the models that practitioners use mention financial security or at least its impact on wellbeing. By considering poverty and its effects, you demonstrate your commitment to upholding the rights of children/young the families and to working within governmental guidelines and policy including ‘[Getting it right for every child](#)’ (GIRFEC) and the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#).
- **having a more complete picture of a family or individual:** looking through the lens of poverty helps you identify issues in the family unit and other areas where support is required
- **more accurate assessments:** taking poverty into account will improve your assessments. Money cuts across every aspect of life. Understanding this will give you and the family a better idea of what’s possible. This will help with setting realistic goals and tasks
- **longer lasting impact:** by giving the right support at the right time, you will help a family overcome barriers and become more resilient

# 1. Initial support and children on the edges of care

Poverty affects all aspects of a person's life, so it is important to think about money, and the lack of it, from the outset.

"Once my son was born, practical help such as food banks helped particularly when I had no money for basics. They also gave me nappies and milk for the baby. I also got some electric top ups which were a life saver in the winter when I had run out. These really helped but you were made to feel that you weren't worth anything accessing these."

"I would have liked to have been taught budgeting skills, prioritising outgoings, how to save money by shopping sensibly, information about how the benefits system works etc."

## Why consider finances and the risk of poverty at this stage

- **to gain a full picture of support needed:** while you may be responsible for only one element of a person's support, issues rarely exist in isolation. By looking at poverty and finance, you may be able to reveal other areas of support required.
- **to clarify the impact on your area of work:** how does a family having little, or no money affect the work you do? For example, you may want to find out why a child does not have age-appropriate clothing or toys. Looking at the parent's finances may show that they don't have enough money to buy these.
- **to give the right support at the right time:** you can help an individual or family get the help they need before things get worse.

## Your role at this stage

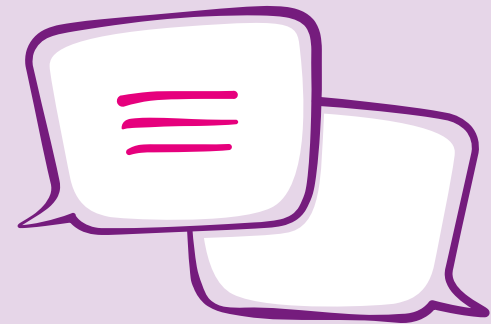
- **supporting the family:** your role is to be there for the family and to support them as best you can. By preventing and mitigating the effects of any financial issues, you will relieve some of the burden, and help the family be in a better position to work with you.
- **factfinding:** it's not always easy to talk about, or understand, money and finances. Knowing how to ask the right questions, in the right way, to get the right information, can help you spot issues and concerns that could affect the family.
- **can be completed alongside your own work:** consider what's going on and adapt – it may be a good idea for a home visit if possible.
- **holistic/multi-disciplinary approach:** who else is involved? How can you work together?
- **include in practice from the start:** money is always relevant.

## How to help at this stage

- **Speak with the families about money:** and keep talking about it
- **Make sure that finances are checked:** benefit entitlements/income maximisation – see checklist 1 on page 7
- **Build relationships and trust:** work with families and other agencies using a multi-disciplinary approach
- **Find help and support for the family:** your area of expertise may not be finance but there are plenty of organisations that can help – see checklist 1

## Practical resources to assist

- **Connect families:** with practical, financial and emotional support – see checklist 1 on page 7
- **Talk about money:** see this [impartial government-backed guide](#) for speaking about money
- **The Promise:** parent guide to be given to the family



# Checklist 1

This checklist will help you recognise where a family may need specific financial, practical, and emotional support. It includes examples and signposting. It takes account of the principles of GIRFEC and UNCRRC.

Checklist	Examples	National resources (Scotland-wide)
<b>Conversation about money</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the family's income and outgoings?</li> <li>• Is the family getting benefits?</li> <li>• Is the family under pressure from outstanding debts and incurring penalties for late or non-payment?</li> <li>• Has debt become unmanageable?</li> <li>• Is the family using food banks?</li> </ul> <p>Understanding the difficulties with money management.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the parent have a bank account?</li> <li>• Do financial difficulties affect the child?</li> <li>• Is there financial support available from family and friends?</li> <li>• Has the family or young person adequate income to meet day-to-day needs and any special needs?</li> <li>• Have poverty and disadvantage affected opportunities?</li> <li>• Is the household income managed for the benefit of all?</li> <li>• Are there problems with debt?</li> <li>• Do you need to explore benefit entitlements?</li> <li>• Is income adequate to ensure the child can take part in school and leisure activities, and pursue special interests and skills?</li> </ul>	<p>Money Advice Scotland:  <a href="https://www.moneyadvicescotland.org.uk/">https://www.moneyadvicescotland.org.uk/</a></p> <p>Money Talk Team at Citizens Advice Scotland: 0800 085 7145  <a href="https://www.moneytalkteam.org.uk/">https://www.moneytalkteam.org.uk/</a></p> <p>National Debt line: 0808 808 4000  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/national-debtline">https://www.gov.uk/national-debtline</a></p> <p>StepChange Debt Charity: 0800 138 1111  <a href="http://www.stepchange.org">www.stepchange.org</a></p> <p>Lone Parent Helpline: 0800 801 0323  <a href="https://opfs.org.uk/talk-to-us/lone-parent-helpline/">https://opfs.org.uk/talk-to-us/lone-parent-helpline/</a></p>
<b>Income maximisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the family receive all benefits it is entitled to?</li> <li>• Is specialist support needed?</li> <li>• What would help?</li> </ul>	<p>Local authority – welfare rights staff, advice shops/hubs, financial wellbeing workers</p> <p>Aberlour Children's Trust: 0800 0856 150  <a href="https://www.aberlour.org.uk/">https://www.aberlour.org.uk/</a></p> <p>Local support:  <a href="https://advice.local.uk/">https://advice.local.uk/</a></p>
<b>Benefits check</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has there been a benefits check to ensure family is receiving full entitlement?</li> </ul>	<p>Child Poverty Action Group: 0141 552 0552            Advice line for advisers about benefits and tax credits            Monday to Thursday 10am to 4pm, Friday 10am to 12 noon  <a href="mailto:advice@cpag.org.uk">advice@cpag.org.uk</a> <a href="http://www.cpag.org.uk">www.cpag.org.uk</a></p> <p>Citizens Advice Scotland: 0800 085 7145  <a href="https://www.cas.org.uk/">https://www.cas.org.uk/</a></p> <p>GOV.UK benefits calculators:  <a href="http://www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators">www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators</a></p> <p>Enable: 0300 0200 101  <a href="https://www.enable.org.uk/">https://www.enable.org.uk/</a></p> <p>Lone Parent Helpline: 0800 801 0323  <a href="https://opfs.org.uk/talk-to-us/lone-parent-helpline/">https://opfs.org.uk/talk-to-us/lone-parent-helpline/</a></p>

<b>Practical support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the effects of lack of income on the physical quality of the home?</li> <li>• Does the family have enough money to meet the needs of the family and child?</li> </ul>	<p>Turn2us: 0808 802 2000  <a href="https://www.turn2us.org.uk/">https://www.turn2us.org.uk/</a></p> <p>Aberlour Children's Trust: 0800 0856 150  <a href="https://www.aberlour.org.uk/">https://www.aberlour.org.uk/</a></p> <p>Scottish Welfare Fund:  <a href="https://www.mygov.scot/scottish-welfare-fund">https://www.mygov.scot/scottish-welfare-fund</a></p>
<b>Specialist support (emotional and mental health)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the effects of lack of income on the emotional capacity of the parent?</li> </ul>	<p>Breathing Space 0800 83 85 87  <a href="https://breathingspace.scot/">https://breathingspace.scot/</a></p> <p>SAMH (Scottish Association for Mental Health) 0344 800 0550 <a href="https://www.samh.org.uk/">https://www.samh.org.uk/</a></p> <p>GP or health visitor and local third sector organisations</p>
<b>Support for children</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the child able to participate in activities like those of their peers?</li> </ul>	<p>Family Lives: 0808 800 2222  <a href="https://www.familylives.org.uk/">https://www.familylives.org.uk/</a></p> <p>Lone Parent Helpline: 0800 801 0323  <a href="https://opfs.org.uk/talk-to-us/lone-parent-helpline/">https://opfs.org.uk/talk-to-us/lone-parent-helpline/</a></p> <p>Buttle UK: 07922 426276  <a href="https://buttleuk.org/">https://buttleuk.org/</a></p> <p>Family Holiday Charity: 0203 117 0650  <a href="https://familyholidaycharity.org.uk/holidays/advice-families">https://familyholidaycharity.org.uk/holidays/advice-families</a></p>
<b>Establish a trusted relationship</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can a referral be made to a local support agency?</li> <li>• Who is the most trusted person?</li> <li>• Who is the lead?</li> </ul>	<p>Local third sector organisations</p> <p>Other professionals, health visitor, GP</p>
<b>Map who is involved</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build a multi-disciplinary map of the professionals involved with the family; consider non-professional support (friends and family).</li> </ul>	



## 2. Children looked after away from home

If the child/young person is to be looked after away from home and away from the family unit, you should have the correct information about what will happen to the family finances. This is a challenging time for the family so it's vital to be sensitive in your approach. Talking about money can be difficult at any time. However, ensuring that everyone is informed helps you and the family. See below for some tips for talking about money.

"If I didn't turn up as I had no money or I arrived late as I walked, it was viewed negatively, rather than anyone trying to find out why I couldn't attend which was due to money.

I felt overwhelming pressure to buy things for my baby to show I was a good mother...I couldn't. I remember buying him a toy from the pound shop. They took it off him as they didn't think it was good or right for his age. That hurt a lot."

"I still go to contact but if I do not have money in my phone to contact them before I arrive it is cancelled. I do not get bus money to attend. (I don't mind as it is my son I'm going to see.)"

"There was no awareness of how quickly my benefits would have stopped and how I would need to live on such a low income. When I was allowed the girls for daily visits there was no financial help. The placement for my oldest child broke down and she was returned to me for which I was given no financial help."

"You are not prepared for the financial impact, and this has huge consequences. You only get money for yourself and there is no consideration about you seeing your child. You can't buy what you or they want. Carers give them everything which is a good thing for the kids, but you just feel lower and depressed as you know you can't compete. It impacts significantly on your mental health."

### What will happen to the family finances?

Once a child or young person is removed from the care of the parent, any benefits the parent is receiving are affected. While every family may be affected differently, for most, this will result in a **significant drop** in income. Some benefits are removed immediately (though this relies on the family informing relevant agencies). Others reduce over time. Further stress to families can arise due to not informing agencies of changes, and this can lead to them being overpaid. Having to repay the overpayment could lead to debt. The reduced income may affect many aspects of a family's life. Keeping the family informed helps prepare them for the change.

[See page 11](#) on financial implications and [see checklist 2 on page 15](#) for further information.

## Why discussing this is important

- **awareness:** you learn about hardship and how this may affect the family
- **realistic expectations:** for you and the family
- **transparency:** families know what is happening to them financially, why this is happening and where to get help
- **families feel supported and informed:** you build trust and a relationship with the family
- **better use of resources:** you can plan for timely mitigation action (such as discretionary funds, applications to crisis funds, debt management and budgeting)

## When and where and who should be involved

- **when:** as soon as possible – where benefits are concerned, the quicker any changes are reported, the less likely the chance of overpayments or sanctioning. Make enough time to have this discussion with the family
- **where:** somewhere private and where you will not be interrupted
- **who:** connect with other practitioners involved beforehand. There may be one practitioner/organisation best placed to support the family. But any practitioner can discuss this with the family, and the discussion can happen more than once

## How to discuss this with the family

Preparation is essential. It may be a difficult conversation so ensure that you have the right information and questions. [Checklist 2 on page 15](#) and practical resources will help you prepare.

## Aspects to think about

- current circumstances (such as family composition) and how this affects the family finances
- who else is involved with the family
- how the income drop affects family life
- what resources the family needs
- expenses and budgeting given reduced income
- possible new expenses (contact visits, travel to appointments, phone credit and so on)
- where you and the family can get information/help – [see checklist 2 on page 15](#)
- practical resources so you can support the family (such as discretionary funds) – [see checklist 2 on page 15](#)
- whether the family can manage the finances and/or benefit claims and extra support needed (advocacy, specialist support for mental health, any adult protection concerns, appointeeship and so on) – [see checklist 2 on page 15](#)

## Practical resources

- letter for DWP/Job Centre Plus/local authority departments/employer – see attached template letter on [appendix A](#) for acting on behalf of a parent
- easy-to-read explanation of when changes to entitlement will occur – [see checklist 2 on page 15](#)
- confidence guides – [how to talk to someone about their money, having difficult conversations](#)
- Parents Guide - What will happen to my benefits if my child is going into care? A step by step guide on how your benefits will be affected if your child is going into care.

## Financial implications when children go into care

Much has been written on poverty as a contributory factor to children becoming looked after, and on the greater risks of poverty for young people leaving care. A review of the most recent research, and discussions with practitioners and organisations working with families, identified the need for more work to understand the financial implications for families when children are taken into care. The analysis of benefit rules and regulations demonstrates a significant drop in income for families.

## When children are removed

When children are removed from the family unit, depending on the benefits being received by the parent, the family could face several financial changes, causing poverty and hardship.

## Immediate impact

**Universal Credit (UC):** claimants (most likely the parent) are responsible for informing the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) about any changes unless an appointeeship is in place. They should do this as soon as possible to avoid overpayment of welfare benefits. It is important to tell parents that any reduction of UC will start from the beginning of the UC assessment period in which the child is removed.

**Childcare costs:** advise the parent that any help with childcare costs will stop. The amount parents are allowed to earn before their UC starts being affected could also change.

**Housing Benefit and Underoccupancy:** if child/children no longer reside in the family home, the parent must inform the local authority immediately. If this results in underoccupancy then the parents' housing benefit entitlement may be reduced by 14% or 25%. In these circumstances the parent may make a claim for a discretionary housing payment to cover this shortfall in housing benefit. If the parent is in a private rental, the local housing allowance may change as the family is treated as needing fewer rooms. Families in social housing and under pension credit age may be subject to 'bedroom tax' as fewer rooms may be required.

**Tax Credits:** as soon as the child is removed from home, they are no longer counted as part of the household. This means that Child Tax Credit will stop straight away. Working Tax Credit could also be affected. The parent must notify [HM Revenue and Customs \(HMRC\)](#) immediately.

**Income support and jobseeker's allowance:** as soon as the child is removed from home, they are no longer counted as part of the household. A lone parent is no longer able to claim income support if they are not caring for a child under five.

## 28 days

If the child gets **Disability Living Allowance** or **Child Disability Payment**, the care component will stop after 28 days if the child is in residential accommodation. If the child is placed with a foster carer, both the care and the mobility components can continue. However, in either situation, who receives the child's disability benefit may change and, for example, a foster carer may be appointed to act on behalf of the child and receive the disability benefit.

## Eight weeks

**Child Benefit** stops after eight weeks. **Scottish Child Payment** and **Best Start Foods** entitlement stop after eight weeks, or earlier if entitlement to a qualifying benefit has already stopped.

## Six months

**Housing costs** for **UC** are affected six months after the child(ren) are removed. DWP may assess the parent as under-occupying the property.

## Case studies

The following CPAG case studies reflect the different family circumstances and demonstrate the enormity of the financial impact on a family when the child or children are removed from the family home and become looked after.

### CASE STUDY ONE

Lone parent, age 32, with two children: a girl aged 12 and a boy aged 5. Living in a housing association house with three bedrooms with a rent of £400 a month (housing costs element paid direct to landlord). Not in paid work. Receives Universal Credit (UC), Child Benefit and Scottish Child Payment (SCP) for both children. The parent's UC assessment period runs from the 4th of one month to the 3rd of the following month. Both children become looked after away from home and accommodated on 28 December 2022.

#### IMMEDIATE IMPACT

UC child elements stop from the beginning of the assessment period in which change happens (4 December 2022).

Before: UC £869.49 a month (net of housing costs)

After: UC £334.91 a month (net of housing costs)

**Loss: £534.58 a month**

#### AFTER 8 WEEKS

Child Benefit for both children stop 8 weeks after they become looked after away from home.

SCP for both children also stop.

Before: Child Benefit and SCP £86.25 per week

After: Child Benefit and SCP £0

**Loss: £86.25 a week**

#### AFTER 6 MONTHS

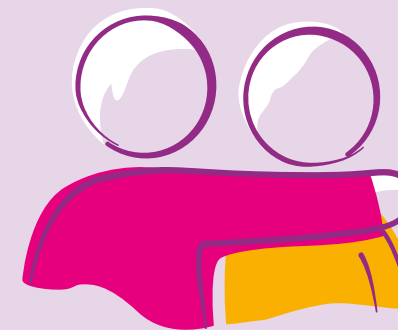
UC housing costs element changes. Parent is no longer treated as needing bedrooms for the two children. She becomes subject to the bedroom tax, which means a 25% reduction in UC housing costs element. This should be mitigated by discretionary housing payment.

#### IMPACT SUMMARY

Total weekly income (net of housing costs)

**Before: £286.90**

**After: £77.29**



These examples/case studies were illustrated by CPAG/OPFS in 2022, and were accurate at that time.

## Case studies

### CASE STUDY TWO

Lone parent, age 34, with one child aged 12. Living in a housing association house with two bedrooms with a rent of £450 a month. Not in paid work. Receives Universal Credit (UC), Child Benefit and Scottish Child Payment (SCP). The child has a disability and gets Child Disability Payment (CDP), highest rate care component. Parent gets Carer's allowance for looking after her child. Her UC assessment period runs from the 12th of one month to the 11th of the following month. The child becomes looked after and accommodated on 10 December 2022. She goes to stay in a residential unit.

#### IMMEDIATE IMPACT

UC child elements stop from the beginning of the assessment period in which change happens (4 December 2022).

Before: UC £1,208.60 a month (net of housing costs)

After: UC £334.91 a month (net of housing costs)

**Loss: £873.69 a month**

#### AFTER 4 WEEKS

CDP stops being paid.

Before: CDP £92.40 a week

After: CDP £0

**Loss: £92.40 a week**

#### AFTER 8 WEEKS

Child Benefit and SCP for the child stop 8 weeks after the child becomes looked after and accommodated.

Before: Child Benefit and SCP £46.80 a week

After: Child Benefit and SCP £0

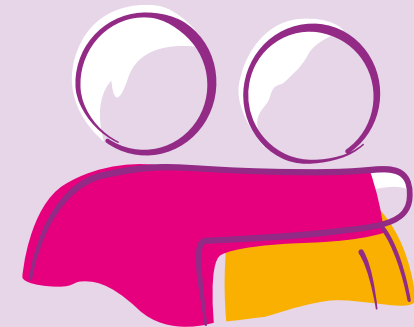
**Loss: £46.80 a week**

#### IMPACT SUMMARY

Total weekly income (net of housing costs)

**Before: £418.11**

**After: £77.29**



These examples/case studies were illustrated by CPAG/OPFS in 2022, and were accurate at that time.

## Checklist 2

Checklist	Examples	Resources
Changes to income	When a child/children or young person that becomes looked after, the families income can reduce the following benefits and allowances; Universal Credit (UC), Child Benefit, Scottish Child Payment, Carer's allowance, Child Disability Payment.	<p>Child Poverty Action Group: 0141 552 0552 Advice line for advisers about benefits and tax credits Monday to Thursday 10am to 4pm, Friday 10am to 12 noon <a href="mailto:advice@cpag.org.uk">advice@cpag.org.uk</a> <a href="http://www.cpag.org.uk">www.cpag.org.uk</a></p> <p>See CPAG factsheet: <a href="https://cpag.org.uk/welfare-rights/resources/factsheet/children-looked-after-local-authority-impact-family-benefits">https://cpag.org.uk/welfare-rights/resources/factsheet/children-looked-after-local-authority-impact-family-benefits</a></p> <p>DWP guidance about Universal Credit (GOV.UK): <a href="https://www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-credit-toolkit-for-partner-organisations">https://www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-credit-toolkit-for-partner-organisations</a> 0800 328 5644</p> <p>Benefits calculators: <a href="https://www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators">https://www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators</a></p> <p>Citizens Advice Scotland advice pages: <a href="https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/benefits/">https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/benefits/</a> 0800 028 1456</p> <p>One Parent Families Scotland advice pages: <a href="https://opfs.org.uk/support-and-advice/">https://opfs.org.uk/support-and-advice/</a> 0808 801 0323</p>

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<p><b>When to advise DWP and what will happen</b></p>	<p><b>Immediately after transition to care</b></p> <p>DWP:  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions</a></p> <p>Social Security Scotland:  <a href="https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/benefits">https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/benefits</a></p> <p>HMRC: Child benefit: 0300 200 3100</p> <p>Tax credits helpline: 0345 300 3900</p>	<p><b>Universal Credit (UC):</b> claimants (most likely the parent) are responsible for advising DWP about any changes unless an appointeeship is in place. This should be done as soon as possible to avoid overpayment of welfare benefits. You should tell parents that any reduction of UC will take effect from the beginning of the UC assessment period in which the child is removed: <a href="https://www.gov.uk/report-benefits-change-circumstances">https://www.gov.uk/report-benefits-change-circumstances</a></p> <p><b>Childcare costs:</b> advise the parent that any help with childcare costs will stop. The amount they are allowed to earn before UC starts being affected could also change.</p> <p><b>Housing benefit:</b> If child/children no longer reside in the family home, the parent must inform the local authority immediately. If this results in underoccupancy then the parents' housing benefit entitlement may be reduced by 14% or 25%. In these circumstances the parent may make a claim for a discretionary housing payment to cover this shortfall in housing benefit: <a href="https://www.mygov.scot/discretionary-housing-payment">https://www.mygov.scot/discretionary-housing-payment</a>. If the parent is in a private rental, the local housing allowance may change as the family is treated as needing fewer rooms Families in social housing and under pension credit age may be subject to 'bedroom tax' as fewer rooms may be required.</p> <p><b>Tax Credits:</b> as soon as the child is removed from home, the child is no longer counted as part of the household. This means that Child Tax Credit stops straight away and Working Tax Credit could also be affected. The parent must notify HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) immediately: <a href="https://www.gov.uk/changes-affect-tax-credits">https://www.gov.uk/changes-affect-tax-credits</a> 0345 300 3900.</p> <p><b>Income support and jobseeker's allowance:</b> as soon as the child is removed, they are no longer counted as part of the household. If they are not caring for a child under five, a lone parent cannot claim for them <a href="https://www.gov.uk/jobseekers-allowance">https://www.gov.uk/jobseekers-allowance</a> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/income-support">https://www.gov.uk/income-support</a> 0800 055 6688</p> <p><b>Child Benefit:</b> stops after eight weeks. There is no need to notify if the child is removed for less than eight weeks. Social workers can use <b>CH193 form</b> if the parent consents for Child Benefit notification. This varies across local authorities: <a href="https://www.tax.service.gov.uk/shortforms/form/CH193">https://www.tax.service.gov.uk/shortforms/form/CH193</a> 0300 200 3100.</p> <p><b>Scottish Child Payment</b> stops after eight weeks. <a href="https://www.mygov.scot/scottish-child-payment">https://www.mygov.scot/scottish-child-payment</a> 0800 182 2222</p> <p><b>Child Disability Payment:</b> the parent must notify the Social Security Scotland straight away. If the child receives the care component, then the parent must notify Social Security Scotland. If a child lives with a foster carer, both components will continue to be paid. If child gets CDP care component it will stop after four weeks. The mobility component continues to be paid. The mobility component continues to be paid. Appointeeship should stop if the child is removed from the home for more than 12 weeks. <a href="https://www.mygov.scot/child-disability-payment-if-your-circumstances-change/need-help">https://www.mygov.scot/child-disability-payment-if-your-circumstances-change/need-help</a> 0800 182 2222</p>
<p><b>What can happen if DWP, HMRC and Social Security Scotland are not informed?</b></p>	<p>Benefits may need to be repaid. This could affect the future income of the family and create debt.</p>	<p>Terms and conditions of benefits claimed state that this is the case. <a href="https://www.gov.uk/benefit-overpayments">https://www.gov.uk/benefit-overpayments</a></p> <p>Consequences of not declaring changes: overpayment, claim withheld/cancelled, criminal charges relating to fraud.</p>
<p><b>Support you can offer – financial and practical</b></p>	<p>Benefit check/financial wellbeing: you need to do this at every stage of the process to give up-to-date information; equip with devices; upfront travel expenses (flexi travel passes).</p>	<p>Local authority, OPFS advice, Citizens Advice, debt advice, housing office/social landlord/landlord. Discretionary budgets from local authority.</p>
<p><b>Funds to offset the loss of income</b></p>	<p>Emergency/crisis grants, food banks.</p>	<p>Scottish Welfare Fund, energy suppliers, and third sector organisations.</p>

## Effect on housing: longer term

### Social housing

A social landlord cannot lawfully evict a tenant who has had their children removed, even permanently because their home is now under-occupied. However, before the Scottish Government subsidised 'the bedroom tax', families reported that the financial impact could lead to homelessness through non-payment of rent.

Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) means that underoccupancy is covered (14% deduction for one bedroom being underoccupied and 25% for two or more bedrooms being underoccupied).

However, if a tenant made themselves intentionally homeless due to rent arrears, then the council does not have a duty to offer permanent accommodation. The tenant 'should' be allowed to stay in temporary accommodation long enough until they find somewhere new to stay. If the tenant disagrees with the council's decision intentionally, they can ask the council to review its decision.

For housing needs based on the composition of the applicant, EVERY registered social landlord (RSL) has a different allocations policy with different lettings rules.

For example, some RSLs may allow a one-bedroom household to have a two-bedroom property if the two-bedroom property is difficult to relet (two-bedroom flats are often difficult to let with maximum occupancy). If the applicant may have a chance in the future of the child in care re-joining the household or visiting the applicant on either an ad-hoc or regular basis, or the parent does not have full-time custody but has regular overnight visits, they may consider applying for a second bedroom. It depends on the RSL so the parent/practitioner may want to contact the RSL to check their rules/allocations policy.

**There are no grounds in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to seek an eviction order from a sheriff for under occupation of a social rented tenancy (housing co-operative, housing association or council).** When a Scottish Secure Tenancy is given to a tenant, it is awarded on the size and needs of the household at the point of allocation.

A Scottish Secure Tenancy can be ended in only six ways. One of these is for the landlord to raise legal action for eviction. There are 15 grounds a landlord can use to ask a sheriff to consider eviction. **Underoccupancy** of a tenancy is not one of them.

If a parent/tenant wishes to move because of underoccupancy, under Section 33 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, a tenant has the right to request to exchange their Scottish Secure Tenancy with another tenant.

There are some grounds for refusal. They must be reasonable grounds. This includes if the property for the incoming tenant would result in under-occupation or overcrowding; the property is not considered suitable for the tenant or members of the household (for example a tenant who, for medical reasons requires a ground floor property with a wet floor shower, would be refused a house with internal stairs with the bathroom sited on the first floor with a shower over the bath). For housing co-operatives, the exchange cannot go ahead if the incoming tenant is not approved for membership with the co-operative.

### Private rentals

**If a tenant has their children removed while occupying a private rented property, the landlord cannot seek to evict on that basis. There is no legal ground to do so.**

The legislation covering private rented accommodation is the Private (Tenancies) (Housing) Scotland Act 2016. Under this Act there are 18 lawful grounds to seek an eviction order. **Underoccupancy** of a tenancy is not one of them.

Shelter Helpline: 0808 800 4444  
Housing advice, rights, support and legislation  
[https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/housing\\_advice](https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice)

Shelter Scotland - Bedroom Tax:  
[https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/housing\\_advice/money\\_help/bedroom\\_tax](https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/money_help/bedroom_tax)

Social housing - Legal basis – 15 grounds for possession:  
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2001/10/schedule/2>

Private Tenant  
<https://www.mygov.scot/private-tenant-eviction/groundsfor-eviction-assured-and-short-assured-tenancies-if-your-landlord-starts-the-eviction-process-from-30-march-2022>



# 3. Reunification

When a child or young person is returning home to the family after being accommodated, the family may need continued support with its finances. In theory, benefit entitlements should be returned to parents/carers, but this can be a lengthy and complicated process. You should be prepared to help the family through this transition.

“My money stopped. There was no awareness of how quickly my benefits would have stopped and how I would need to live on such a low income. My benefits were not looked at until I had proof from the relevant agency that my daughter had been returned so I had to struggle on my sole benefit for several weeks.”

“There was no support to help me deal with the stuff that had gone on at home nor to help repair the relationship with my dad. Even when I was able to start going home at weekends there was no support to prepare me or to make things any better while I was there.”

“I think there should be some fund or guidance for when you have contact and with housing as if you are in a one-bedroom flat – I don’t care what anyone says – you do not stand a chance. We have been talking about my son leaving care and already I know financially I could not manage. I am trying to support him to stay with his carers which again hurt and impacts on my mental health so can’t imagine how it was impacting him.”

## What happens to finances when children return

Depending on the age of the child returning home, most benefit entitlements should return to the family. However, these entitlements and payments do not happen overnight, and there could be a lengthy wait. This means that the family might regain parenting responsibilities before the income required to cover the extra costs. Depending on the age and educational status of the child or young person returning home, you may need to provide different support for the family.

[See financial implications pages and checklist 3 on page 20.](#)

## Why it is important to get the finances right

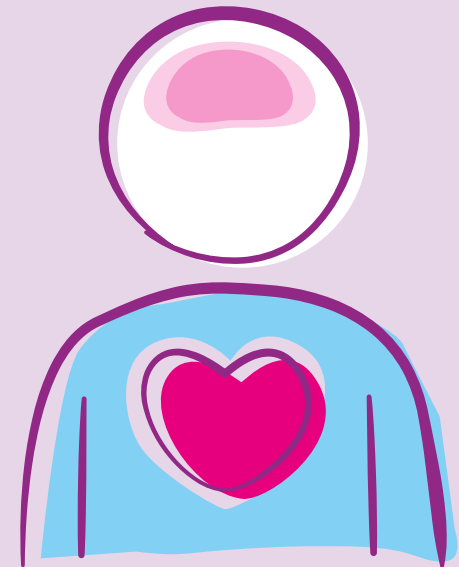
- **creates a stable, safe environment for the family:** gives the best chance of reunification being a success
- **prevents financial issues:** preparing for reunification helps to avoid new financial issues prompted by reunification

## Who, when and where

- **who: multi-disciplinary/holistic setting** – communicating with other workers involved is beneficial. Some organisations may have a particular focus or duty. But anyone can talk about finances at any time
- **when: as soon as possible** – whenever there is an initial discussion of reunification, it’s good to get prepared. Think about how the child/young person returning will affect the current circumstances. Waiting until the child has returned home is too late
- **where: suitable environment** – be aware of the environment. Money is often a private or sensitive issue, and you need to be mindful of how someone may feel when discussing this. Choosing the right environment (quiet, comfortable and where you won’t be overheard) will help families feel at ease

## How you can help

- **be proactive:** being prepared and looking ahead will allow the family more time to act. The earlier changes are reported and/or prepared for, the more chance of a better outcome for the family. Some entitlements take time to be re-instated, so the quicker changes are reported, the less time a family must wait for them.
- **use any resources you have:** you will likely have access to some resources (grants, guidance and so on). Think about what the family needs and how you can help make the transition smoother [see checklist 3 on page 20](#).
- **keep talking about money:** make sure that you keep discussing money matters, as circumstances often change. Be aware of any changes, and use this as an opportunity to bring the topic up [see checklist 3 on page 20](#).
- **manage the family's expectations:** both parent and child/ren will have expectations of reunification. The child or young person may have had a different experience in care than at home (such as outings and new clothes and so on). Help manage the different expectations and discuss realistic aims to help the family settle.



## Financial implications: young person age 16+ not continuing in education or training

There can be various financial challenges when a young person aged 16+ returns to the family home. For example, if they are no longer in non-advanced education, their parent will not be able to reclaim **Child Benefit**/any means-tested benefit for them. If the young person is still under 18, they are, themselves, likely to be excluded from claiming **Universal Credit (UC)**.

If a parent was receiving support from **Child Benefit** and, for example, **UC** for a young person (for example a 17-year-old still at school) they might receive around £384.47 a month. If the young person was able to claim **UC** in their own right, they might receive around £265.31 a month.

If a young person has been looked after by the local authority at or beyond age 16, then the local authority has a responsibility for the young person under section 29 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. Questions may arise for the local authority about how they fulfil these obligations for a young person returning to the family home. If a care-experienced person does enter further or higher education, then they can expect to be eligible for the care-experienced students bursary.

[Support for Care Experienced students - SAAS](#)

Social work may be able to help financially using discretionary funds. The length of time to process these funds varies across local authorities.

## Financial implications: children under 16 or 16+ and continuing in education or training

### Child(ren) reunited

Depending on the age and educational/training status of the child(ren) returning home, the family finances may not immediately improve. It can take several months for the children to be reflected in the family finances.

### Immediate impact

For children under the age of 16 and those over 16 but continuing in some types of education and training, the parent will become eligible for some child-related benefits. For example, the child elements of **Universal Credit (UC)**, increased **housing element of UC**, **Child Benefit**, **Scottish Child Payments**, **Best Start Grants** and so on. Applications for these benefits should be made without delay. [Child Benefit when your child turns 16 - GOV.UK](#)

### One month

Depending on the reunification date and the assessment periods for **UC**, payment for the child-related elements and increased housing costs should be re-instated within one month of the child returning home.

### Four months

**Child Benefit** can take up to 16 weeks to be processed and paid. Most Scottish Benefits (that is **Scottish Child Payment**, **Best Start Grants**) do not have published timescales for processing times but are often linked to **Child Benefit** processes.

### Six months plus

Most child-related benefits should be re-instated and paid by 6 months after reunification.

# Checklist 3

Checklist	Examples	Resources
<p><b>Preparing for reunification</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the home big enough?</li> <li>• Does the home have the furniture needed for the child/children returning?</li> <li>• What are the immediate expenses?</li> <li>• Is there any support to help cover these costs?</li> <li>• How soon will reunification happen?</li> </ul>	<p>Local authority discretionary funds and Scottish Welfare Fund.</p>
<p><b>Benefit check</b></p>	<p>Has there been a benefits check to ensure family is receiving full entitlement?</p>	<p>Child Benefit: the parent should notify the Child Benefit Office.            Child Benefit Helpline 0300 200 3100            Mon – Fri, 8am – 6pm            Textphone: 0300 200 3103  <a href="http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/child-benefit">http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/child-benefit</a></p> <p>Child Poverty Action Group: 0141 552 0552 Advice line for advisers about benefits and tax credits Monday to Thursday 10am to 4pm, Friday 10 am to 12 noon            advice@cpag.org.uk  <a href="https://www.cpag.org.uk">https://www.cpag.org.uk</a></p> <p>Citizens Advice Scotland: 0800 085 7145  <a href="https://www.cas.org.uk/">https://www.cas.org.uk/</a></p> <p>GOV.UK benefits calculators:  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators">https://www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators</a></p> <p>Enable: 0300 0200 101  <a href="https://www.enable.org.uk/">https://www.enable.org.uk/</a></p> <p>Lone Parent Helpline: 0800 801 0323  <a href="https://opfs.org.uk/talk-to-us/lone-parent-helpline/">https://opfs.org.uk/talk-to-us/lone-parent-helpline/</a></p>

# Additional organisations for signposting

<b>Lone parent families</b>	One Parent Families Scotland <a href="http://www.opfs.org.uk">www.opfs.org.uk</a> Fife Gingerbread <a href="http://www.fifegingerbread.org.uk">www.fifegingerbread.org.uk</a>
<b>Minority ethnic families</b>	BEMIS <a href="http://www.bemis.org.uk">www.bemis.org.uk</a> AMINA <a href="http://www.mwrc.org.uk">www.mwrc.org.uk</a> Shakti Women's Aid <a href="http://shaktiedinburgh.co.uk/">http://shaktiedinburgh.co.uk/</a> Migrant Help <a href="https://www.migranthehelpuk.org/">https://www.migranthehelpuk.org/</a> Scottish Refugee Council <a href="http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk">www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk</a> One Scotland <a href="http://www.onescotland.org">www.onescotland.org</a>
<b>Families with a disabled adult or child</b>	Capability Scotland <a href="http://www.capability.scot">www.capability.scot</a> Disability Information Scotland <a href="http://www.disabilityscot.org.uk">www.disabilityscot.org.uk</a> Enable Group <a href="http://www.enable.org.uk">www.enable.org.uk</a> Carr Gomm <a href="http://www.carrgomm.org">www.carrgomm.org</a> Share Scotland <a href="http://www.sharescotland.uk">www.sharescotland.uk</a> Action for Children <a href="http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk">www.actionforchildren.org.uk</a> Disability Equality Scotland <a href="http://www.disabilityequality.scot">www.disabilityequality.scot</a> Family Fund <a href="http://www.familyfund.org.uk">www.familyfund.org.uk</a> Scottish Autism <a href="http://www.scottishautism.org">www.scottishautism.org</a> National Autistic Society <a href="http://www.autism.org.uk">www.autism.org.uk</a>
<b>Mental health support</b>	SAMH <a href="http://www.samh.org.uk">www.samh.org.uk</a> Mental Health Foundation <a href="http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk">www.mentalhealth.org.uk</a> Health in Mind <a href="http://www.health-in-mind.org.uk">www.health-in-mind.org.uk</a> Breathing Space <a href="http://www.breathingspace.scot">www.breathingspace.scot</a> Home Start <a href="http://www.home-start.org.uk">www.home-start.org.uk</a>
<b>Families with a young mother (under 25)</b>	Family Lives <a href="http://www.familylives.org.uk">www.familylives.org.uk</a> Child Poverty Action Group <a href="http://www.cpag.org.uk">www.cpag.org.uk</a> Young Mums Support Network <a href="http://www.ymsn.co.uk">www.ymsn.co.uk</a>

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# Template letter

[Download here](#)

Organisational Logo/Headed Letter

Organisation Name

Organisation Address

Address Line 2

Town/City

Postcode

Date:

Reference: *could be someone's National Insurance Number, name and address or other relevant reference, etc*

Subject: *change of circumstances for Parent's name and address*

Dear: *insert individual's name or role*

I am writing on behalf of *parent's name* to tell you about their recent changes in circumstances. *Parent's name* has given me permission to act for them and has countersigned this letter.

On the *date of accommodation*, *parent's name's* child(ren) went into local authority care and are no longer staying in the family home.

Please update as necessary *any claims for benefit, entitlement, housing, etc – complete as required.*

I would be grateful if you would take account of the practical and emotional impact of this on *Parent's name* and allow them some leeway with appointments.

Please let me know if you need any further information or confirmation: *email, phone number, etc.*

Yours sincerely

Practitioner signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Countersigned by parent: \_\_\_\_\_