

Fact sheet 4: Tips for claiming Disability Living Allowance (DLA)



Things like extra laundry, special diets, endless appointments, not being able to rely on friends or neighbours to help out or feeling unable to go back to work, are all a strain on the pocket. Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is often the first benefit parents think about claiming, but many of you tell us it's hard to know how to make a strong case. So, here are some tips.

It's best to get the form from the DLA Help line on 03457 123456 as it will be date stamped and, as long as you return it within six weeks, your claim will be considered from that date.

Review packs are sent out six months before a current award ends. The DWP needs at least eight weeks to make a decision - so you need to get your review pack back in good time. Otherwise, you'll find you're without money while your claim is assessed.

Make it a top priority. Awards are worth a lot and DLA is a passport benefit to other allowances, premiums, and sources of financial help. Don't assume if the application is being reviewed that your child's claim will be rubber-stamped. You'll have a lot to lose if your child's claim is refused and you'll need to work just as hard on the review as you did on the original claim. The DWP sends review packs six months before the award runs out—time to gather evidence that supports what you say on the claim pack about your child. It can feel more manageable if you just aim to fill in a few pages a day.

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.

Look at all of the most recent advices and reports you have about your child and read through them. They can often help you understand the underlying reasons why your child appears clumsy or 'not to listen'.

Don't worry too much about spellings or writing in complete sentences. But try to keep it legible: remember it has to be read by someone who isn't familiar with your handwriting. If you make a mistake, it's better just to cross it out rather than use Tippex.

Tick the small boxes on every page but don't bother filling in pages that aren't relevant. When there is plenty to say, fill up the big boxes. The new format claim pack has very little space to include much detail and you may well have to use the extra pages at the back. Better still, attach what you want to say as handwritten notes or a typed document.

If you add extra sheets put your child's name, date of birth and reference number at the top of each page in case they come adrift after you've attached them to the claim form. If you can type and print off your extra sheets it is fine to do that.

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. **Make comparisons between younger siblings or friends and your disabled child.**

As you fill each page 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. Even if some of it feels too painful or ridiculous to share, try to get it down. Then say what would happen if your child didn't get the help they needed.

Include anecdotes that illustrate the problems: times when your child has misread a situation or been misunderstood, the muddle or frustration when your child hasn't had help, or unsupervised disasters.

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

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.

Nights are hard to get supporting advice for, so we strongly suggest keeping a sleep diary for a week or two. 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 school book? It helps if others are able to say you report broken nights.

Don't worry about repetition: common threads running through your claim are important. Read it back. Don't be surprised if you feel shocked or saddened. Keep going. Is there anything you've missed?

Check that all professionals whose details you include know you are claiming; they may well be contacted. Often GPs get by-passed as your child is referred on to specialist consultants, but they are likely to be contacted now so it may be worth making an appointment with your doctor to put them in the picture.

Get a supporting statement from a professional who really knows your child well. Remember that this person may have only seen your child in a clinic or school setting. Make sure this professional isn't guessing how things are at home. Ask them to read what you have written, or give them a précis of the main points you need stressed.

Ask for the form back by a particular date: drop it off and pick it up yourself from the professional. Don't trust the post, just now this is your only copy and you've invested a lot of time on it.

Send supplementary evidence that supports what you say: medical reports, assessments, advices and Statements or 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: IEPs or SEN Support plans are often better at reflecting the challenges your child has to manage at school. 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!

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. To be sure your claim arrives safely, post it Special Delivery.

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.

Your health visitor or social worker may offer to fill in forms with you. Many disability-specific organisations have fact sheets about claiming for a child with that disability and a few have local support workers to help tackle the forms.

The Amaze helpline (01273 772289) offers advice about making claims, filling in forms and what to do if your claim is unsuccessful for parents in Brighton and Hove.

Amaze has examples of claims for a variety of different ages and needs, with lots of quotes from parents. Reading what others have included can help you feel more confident that you are 'on the right track' and can prompt you to add stuff that you may not have thought important.

If you still feel unsure what to say and keep putting the forms in a drawer, we may be able to offer you one to one help. DLA volunteers are often other parents of children with similar difficulties to your own child. They are trained and supported by Amaze. They listen carefully to what you say, make sense of any assessments about your child and help you to use these to make a strong claim. They can even fill it out.

For more general help and advice you can contact the DLA Helpline (03457 123456) but remember advisors are unlikely to know much about child development or specific disabilities or illness.

If English is not your first language, the BEL can organise an interpreter and an adviser to make claims over the phone. The form is completed in English so before you check and sign it you need to find an interpreter.

For more information contact:

Amaze

Community Base
113 Queens Road
Brighton BN1 3XG

Helpline: 01273 772289

Email: info@amazebrighton.org.uk

Web: www.amazebrighton.org.uk



This fact sheet is one of a wide range produced by Amaze and available via our helpline or website. Others you may find particularly useful are: (15) Switch, Swap and Save Energy; and (16) Choosing Childcare
