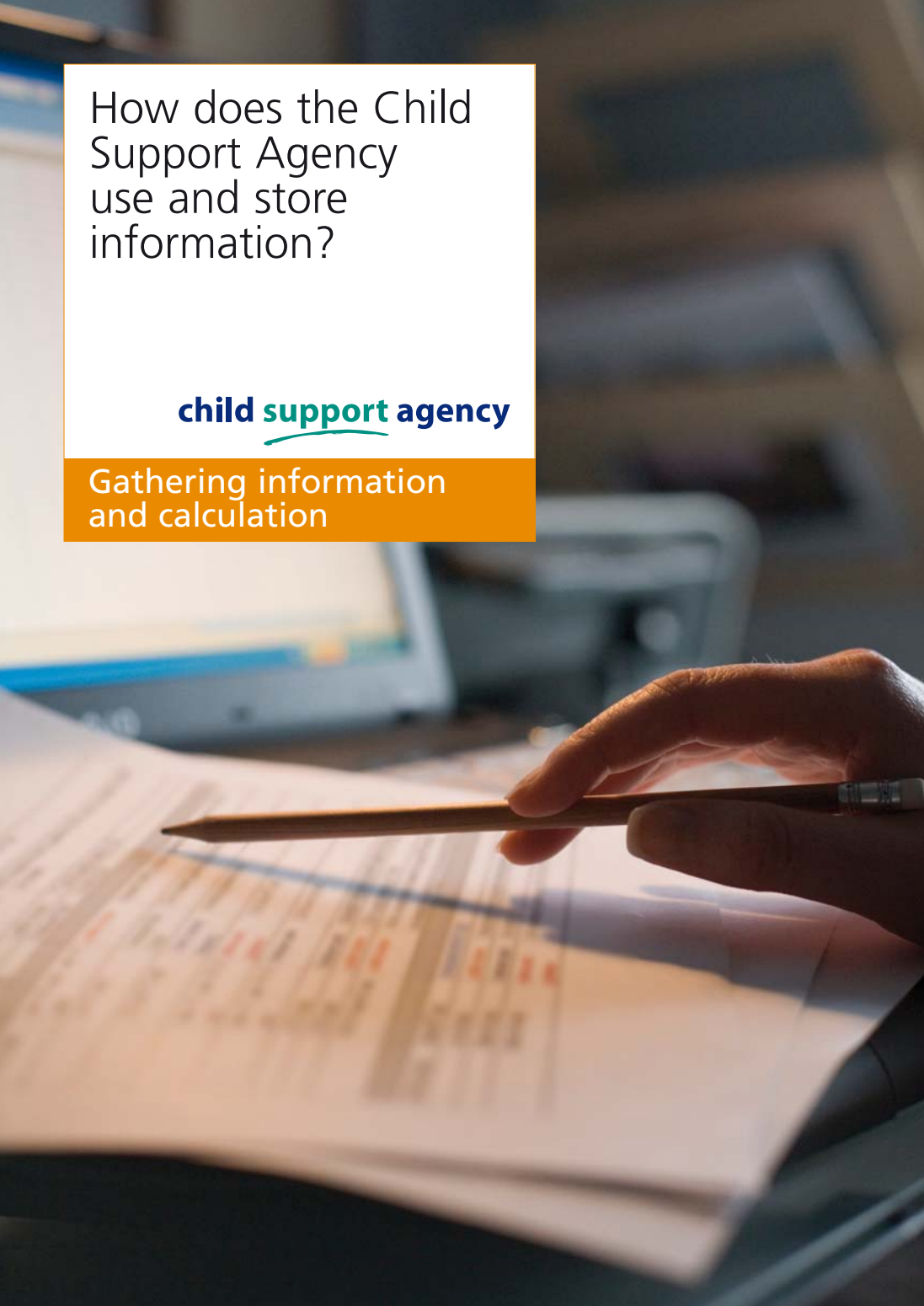


How does the Child Support Agency use and store information?

child support agency

Gathering information
and calculation



What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet tells you how and why we collect information from parents and employers, and what we do with it. The leaflet also explains how you can get access to any information we have stored about you.

In this leaflet, we use some standard terms to talk about our services and the way we work. The glossary at the end explains them.

Important information about this leaflet

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 1 November 2008, but it may not reflect changes to the law or our procedures after this date. You may wish to get independent advice before making financial decisions based on the leaflet.

How does the Child Support Agency use and store information?

About us

The Child Support Agency (CSA) is the Government's child maintenance service. It is provided by the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission.

Our role is to make sure that parents who live apart from their children contribute towards their children's upkeep by paying child maintenance.

We use a standard process to work out how much child maintenance should be paid in each case, and to manage the payments. We can take legal action if the right amount of money is not paid at the right time.

To get help or more information, visit our website **www.csa.gov.uk** or call us on **0845 713 3133** or **0845 713 8924** textphone. For details of call charges, opening times and our Welsh-language helpline, see page 17.

If you want to make child maintenance arrangements privately, rather than through the CSA, contact Child Maintenance Options for impartial information and support. Visit their website at **www.cmoptions.org** or call them on 0800 988 0988 or 0800 988 9888 (textphone).

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How does the Child Support Agency use and store information?

Why does the CSA collect information?

We collect information from various sources so that we can deal with applications for child maintenance. The information helps us to:

- trace non-resident parents
- work out how much the non-resident parent must pay, and
- make sure that the non-resident parent pays the right amount at the right time.

Who does the CSA get the information from?

When we want to start working out how much child maintenance a non-resident parent must pay, we first ask them and the parent with care for the information we need.

But if parents don't give us this information, we are allowed to ask other people and organisations for it, including:

- the non-resident parent's employer(s), their accountant, or companies or partnerships that they provide services to
- government organisations, such as Jobcentre Plus, The Pension Service, HM Revenue & Customs and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)
- prison services and local councils
- organisations that have information about the non-resident parent's financial history, such as banks and building societies, credit reference agencies, and gas and electricity suppliers.

We don't have to get either parent's permission to make these requests.

How does the Child Support Agency use and store information?

What changes to my circumstances must I tell the CSA about?

If either parent's circumstances change, this can mean we need to change the amount of maintenance that must be paid. So you should tell us if there is a change to any of the information you gave us to work out child maintenance, such as the amount of income the non-resident parent gets.

In particular, if you are a non-resident parent, you **must** tell us if:

- your address changes (you **must** tell us about this within 7 days of the change)
- you pay child maintenance through a deduction from earnings order and you leave your job. You **must** tell us:
 - the name and address of your new employer (if any)
 - how much you expect to earn, and
 - your payroll number (if any).

If you are a parent with care, you **must** tell us if there is a change to:

- the number of children living with you that the non-resident parent must pay child maintenance for, or
- the number of nights a child regularly stays overnight with the non-resident parent.

How does the Child Support Agency use and store information?

If you fail to give us the information we need, or you give us information that you know is false, we can take you to court and you could be fined up to £1,000. This applies to any person or organisation who, by law, must give us information – such as employers and accountants as well as parents.

Not all changes of circumstance will mean we need to change the amount of child maintenance that must be paid. We may not change the amount of child maintenance if the non-resident parent's regular net weekly income changes by less than 5%.

How does the Child Support Agency use and store information?

In what other ways can the CSA get information?

Sometimes we use our inspectors to gather the information we need. This happens when people or organisations don't give us the information we have asked for.

Inspectors can visit the non-resident parent's place of work. They can also visit other places where information is held about them.

It is a criminal offence to:

- make it difficult for our inspectors to do their jobs
- deliberately delay the process of gathering information
- refuse or fail to answer our questions, or
- refuse or fail to show us documents we ask for.

We can prosecute people for any of these offences and they could be fined up to £1,000.

Who does the CSA pass personal information to?

We take the protection of personal information very seriously. We will not tell anyone a parent's address or phone number unless a court orders us to release an address. If the law allows, we may also give information about parents to some other organisations, including:

- other government bodies such as Jobcentre Plus and HM Revenue & Customs
- local councils (in connection with Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit)
- a court or tribunal (in connection with child maintenance), and
- debt-collection agencies and other organisations that help us collect child maintenance.

We can also pass on information about you if we think it will help to prevent or detect crime.

How does the Child Support Agency use and store information?

What information does the CSA put in letters about how it works out child maintenance?

After working out the amount of child maintenance to be paid, we send a letter to both parents showing:

- which children have been included in the child maintenance calculation
- the amount of the non-resident parent's net income (income after things like tax, National Insurance and pension contributions have been taken off)
- the number of children living with the non-resident parent, and
- any special circumstances that have been taken into account.

This helps you check that we have worked out child maintenance using the correct information.

We may also give other information to either parent, but only to explain what has happened in their case, or how we have worked out child maintenance. If we worked it out under the scheme set up before 3 March 2003, this may include details about both parents' income or benefits.

What happens in appeal cases?

If you appeal against a child maintenance decision, we'll send copies of all the information related to that decision to the Social Security and Child Support Appeals (SSCSA) Tribunal and to the other parent. Either parent can ask us to remove their address, or any other information that might let people know their whereabouts, from the papers.

If you want to know more about appeals, get a copy of the leaflet *How can I appeal against a child maintenance decision?* (CSL307). See the back page for details.

How does the Child Support Agency use and store information?

Can I have access to my personal information?

Under the Data Protection Act 1998, you can ask what personal information we hold about you on computer and in some paper records. You must ask us in writing and give us information to help us check your identity, including:

- your full name
- your date of birth
- your address
- the CSA case number, and
- your National Insurance number.

You need to give enough detail – for example, the CSA office you deal with – to help us to identify and find the information.

You should send the letter to:

- the Data Protection Officer at the CSA office that deals with your case, or

The Child Support Agency
Data Protection Unit
Room BP6002
Benton Park View
Longbenton
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE98 1YX.

We'll send you a copy of the information if we have it. We'll do this as soon as possible, and within 40 days.

Where can I get more help and information?

If you want to know more about child maintenance and how we work it out, visit our website at **www.csa.gov.uk**. You can download all our leaflets from there and also find out how much child maintenance might be in your situation, using our online calculator. The calculator is for guidance only, and we don't keep the information you give when using it.

If you would like to talk to someone about your case, you should call the number on the top right-hand corner of your most recent letter from us. That number will be for the office handling your case.

If you do not yet have a case with us or cannot find a recent letter, you can contact our national helpline. The person taking your call won't have your personal information so won't be able to answer questions on your case. However, they can help you with anything general to do with child maintenance. They will also be able to give you the phone number of the office handling your case if you want to ask specific questions.

You can call the national helpline on **0845 713 3133** from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 5pm on Saturdays.

How does the Child Support Agency use and store information?

Please have your National Insurance number with you when you call.

We may record our phone calls to check our service and to train our employees.

Textphone services

If you have speech or hearing difficulties, a textphone service is available on **0845 713 8924**.

Textphones are for people who find it hard to speak or hear clearly. If you do not have a textphone, some libraries or citizens advice bureaux may have one. Textphones do not receive text messages from mobile phones.

Welsh-language helpline

If you want to speak to us in Welsh, you can ring our Welsh-language helpline on **0845 713 8091**. The line is open from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. There is also a Welsh-language textphone service on **0845 713 8099**.

Other languages

If English is not your first language, you can use your own interpreter or one we provide.

Call charges

From 1 April 2008, calls to **0845** numbers from BT landlines should cost no more than 4p a minute. You may have to pay more if you use another phone company or 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.

To visit our website, go to **www.csa.gov.uk**.

Information in other formats

This leaflet is available in other languages in Braille and on audio cassette. You can order information in these formats online or by contacting our national helpline.

We also have large-print versions of this leaflet available for you to download from our website, **www.csa.gov.uk**.

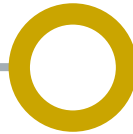
How a child maintenance case can progress

This diagram shows you how a child maintenance case can progress. This leaflet covers part of the process at the highlighted stage.



Information and guidance

CSA can provide information on how the process works, what parents will need to do and what might be an acceptable amount of maintenance in their case.



Application

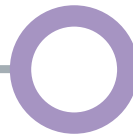
A case officially begins when a parent applies to us to set up child maintenance payments.

If there is a change in either parent's life that could affect the amount of child maintenance that should be paid, we can review your case – so let us know.



Gathering information and calculation

To work out the amount of child maintenance that should be paid, we need to gather important information. We ask both parents to provide certain information. When we have this, we will work out child maintenance.



Payment

The non-resident parent pays the agreed amount on the agreed dates and in the agreed way. This can be either direct to the parent with care, or to us. We then pass the payments on.

Enforcement

If the payments aren't made on time, we can take action.

How does the Child Support Agency use and store information?

Leaflets available from us

What is child maintenance and how does it affect me?

(Reference: CSL301) For all parents

How do I complain about the service I get from the Child Support Agency?

(Reference: CSL308) For all parents

How do I apply for child maintenance?

(Reference: CSL309) For children aged 12 and over in Scotland or their parents

How is child maintenance worked out?

(Reference: CSL303) For all parents

What happens if someone denies they are the parent of a child?

(Reference: CSL304) For all parents

How can I appeal against a child maintenance decision?

(Reference: CSL307) For all parents

My case is moving to the child maintenance scheme introduced in 2003 – what will change?

(Reference: CSL310) For any parent whose case is moving to the current scheme

How does the Child Support Agency use and store information?

(Reference: CSL311) For all parents

How do I pay child maintenance?

(Reference: CSL305) For non-resident parents

How will I receive child maintenance?

(Reference: CSL314) For parents with care

What action can the Child Support Agency take if parents don't pay?

(Reference: CSL306) For all parents

Glossary

Child

For child maintenance purposes, someone is a child if they are aged:

- under 16, or
- under 19 and in full-time education doing a course that is not higher than A-level or an equivalent standard.

Child maintenance

Money paid by the non-resident parent to the parent with care to help pay for their child's everyday living costs.

Deduction from earnings order

One of the ways we normally set up payments if the non-resident parent is employed. Under a deduction from earnings order, we ask the non-resident parent's employer to take child maintenance direct from the non-resident parent's earnings and send it to us.

We can also set up a deduction from earnings order if the non-resident parent is employed and they have not kept to other payment methods or failed to agree a payment method.

Non-resident parent

The parent who the child does not normally live with.

Parent with care

The parent or carer who the child normally lives with and who therefore pays for most of the child's everyday living costs. In some cases this can be a grandparent, guardian or other family member – who is known as the 'person with care', rather than the parent with care.

CSA leaflets are also available in other languages, in large print, in Braille and on audio cassette.

You can get any of these leaflets:

- by phone on 0845 713 3133 (the line is open from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 5pm on Saturdays)
- by textphone on 0845 713 8924, or
- from our website at www.csa.gov.uk.

Where textphone numbers are provided, these are for people who find it hard to speak or hear clearly. If you do not have a textphone, some libraries or citizens advice bureaus may have one. Textphones do not receive text messages from mobile phones.

CSL311

October 2008

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A service provided by the Child Maintenance
and Enforcement Commission

ISBN: 978-1-84763-546-4

