

Tips for claiming Disability living allowance

It's best to get the form from the DLA Help line on 08457 123 456 as it will be date stamped and, as long as you return it within six weeks, your claim will be considered from that date.

Give it a high priority. Awards are worth a lot and DLA is a passport benefit to other allowances, premiums, and sources of financial help. 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. If you run out of space, write in the margins or add extra sheets.

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.

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 keep a 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, 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. 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 of SEN are all useful. Be wary of school reports, they are written to be shared with your child and so are usually very positive: Individual Education Plans are often better at reflecting the challenges your child has to manage at school.

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.

Don't give up if your claim is refused. Over 50% of these decisions are overturned, so ask for the decision to be reviewed or go to appeal.

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

For more general help and advice you can contact the DLA Helpline (08457 12 3456) or **The Benefits Enquiry Line (BEL)** (0800 88 22 00). But remember advisors are unlikely to know much about child development or specific disabilities or illness.