We know that the coronavirus (COVID-19) is affecting us all in many ways. The government has been making a variety of changes to the way it supports us all during the outbreak.

This is a very strange and unsettling time we are currently going through, and your Personal Advisor (PA) or Key Worker should be your first point of contact for support.

The Department for Education (DfE) has produced a series of factsheets specifically for care leavers to provide information about what support is available (links to the other guidance are provided below).

## Main things you need to know:

* You can get support with your rent, bills and benefits if you are struggling due to coronavirus (COVID-19).
* [Emergency guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-and-renting-guidance-for-landlords-tenants-and-local-authorities) is now in place to suspend tenants from being evicted from social or private rented accommodation during the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. Since 26 March 2020, most landlords have to give most renters 3 months’ notice if they intend to seek possession (i.e. serve notice that they want to end the tenancy/evict you). This means most landlords cannot apply to start the court process until after this period. Landlords can choose to give more than this three months’ notice.
* The government has issued [guidance](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/government-support-available-for-landlords-and-renters-reflecting-the-current-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak) to support landlords and tenants who are affected by coronavirus (COVID-19) to remain in their homes wherever possible.

## Your questions answered:

**Q: Do I still need to pay my rent?**

**A:** Yes, you should continue to pay your rent and follow the terms of your tenancy agreement.

**Q: What should I do if I can’t pay my rent?**

**A:** In the first instance you should speak to your landlord if you think you will have difficulty meeting a rental payment. During this crisis the government is encouraging tenants and landlords to work together to put in place a rent payment scheme. They are also asking landlords and tenants to work together to establish an affordable repayment plan (if you fall behind with your payments due to COVID-19), taking into account your individual circumstances.

**Q: Will I be able to get help with my rent and council tax?**

**A:** If you are struggling to pay rent and facing financial hardship due to coronavirus (COVID-19), support is available.

If you are eligible for [Universal Credit](https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit) this will include support for housing costs. If you are on a low income you may be able to apply for help directly from your **local Council**. You will need to phone your local authority to ask about the help available to pay your rent and council tax.

You may also be eligible for **Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)**. This is a fund that local authorities can access to help people pay their rent.

DHPs can be paid to those entitled to Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit who face a shortfall in meeting their housing costs. These payments are very flexible and can be considered where, in the local authority’s opinion, further financial assistance towards housing costs is required.

* Local authorities are able to support renters with housing costs in the private and social rented sector.
* The payments are entirely at local authority discretion, including the amount and duration of any award.
* Local authorities administer the scheme as they are best placed to make informed judgements about relative priorities and needs in their area to ensure that the most vulnerable are supported and the limited funds are targeted effectively.

There has been an increase in the [Local Housing Allowance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-housing-allowance-lha-rates-applicable-from-april-2020-to-march-2021) rates for Universal Credit and Housing Benefit claimants. This will apply to all private renters who are new or existing Universal Credit housing element customers, and to existing [Housing Benefit](https://www.gov.uk/housing-benefit) customers.

**Q: Can I get help with gas and electricity bills?**

**A:** Speak to your energy supplier if you're struggling financially or in arrears with gas or electricity bills. You could get support including:

* reduced bills or debt repayments
* a temporary break in your bills or debt arrangements

If you have a pre-payment meter, they may be able to, for example:

* arrange for someone else to top up your meter
* add credit to your account automatically
* send you a pre-loaded top up card

You may need to leave your meter box unlocked if you need someone else to top it up. Disconnections of pre-payment meters are suspended.

**Q: I live in support/semi-independent accommodation. Will I be able to get support and be protected from eviction?**

**A:** If you are worried about your finances you should speak to your PA and/or Local Authority to see what they can support you. You should also read our [Universal Credit factsheet](https://educationgovuk.sharepoint.com/sites/csc/WorkplaceDocuments/04_Children_in_Care/03_Transitions/Leaving_Care/Covid-19/Factsheets/4.%20Guidance%20factsheet%20for%20care%20leavers%20on%20Universal%20Credit%20during%20COVID.docx).

If you are living in supported/semi-independent accommodation classified as hostel accommodation, including homeless hostels, who hold a licence agreement (not a tenancy), this is known as an ‘excluded group’ and in these circumstances you don’t have cover in the new protections from eviction legislation. However, all the current government guidance directs people to stay at home, and therefore, we would hope that providers are working with you and the local authority to support you to remain where you are, particularly in the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis, rather than to focus on eviction.

This is why it is important for you to follow [guidelines](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing) set by the government and prevent any issues with your accommodation.

We have also produced specific care leaver [guidance](file:///C:\Users\kadam\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\2NT0BUN4\Supporting%20Young%20People%20(aged%2016-25)%20in%20Supported%20Accommodation%20during%20coronavirus%20(COVID-19)%20(002).pdf) for those in supported accommodation.

**Q: I am currently homeless and I am worried about coronavirus (COVID-19). How can I get help to find accommodation and stay safe?**

**A:** You will need to contact your PA and local housing authority as soon as you can, and they will assist you.

**Q: I am homeless and have been staying in hostels. Will hostels and other accommodation options still be open?**

**A:** Recent measures put in place by the government to deal with coronavirus (COVID-19) state that all non-essential premises must close. However, where hotels, hostels and B&Bs are providing rooms to support those who are homeless through arrangements with local authorities and other public bodies, they should remain open. You should contact your local authority for further assistance in this situation. They may be able to help you with longer term housing solutions as well as support in the short term.

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| Other sources of information available to you  * [Information on what you need to do during coronavirus (COVID-19).](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus) * [Information and FAQs on the wide range of employment and benefits support available](https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/employment-and-benefits-support/). * [Guidance for tenants and landlords about renting and coronavirus (COVID-19).](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-and-renting-guidance-for-landlords-tenants-and-local-authorities) * [Guidance for local government on a range of issues during coronavirus (COVID-19).](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-government#housing) * The charity Shelter has [information on housing advice during coronavirus (COVID-19).](https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/coronavirus#Rent_payment_problems) * Citizens Advice [information and advice on coronavirus (COVID-19).](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/health/coronavirus-what-it-means-for-you/) * Money Advice Service [information and advice on paying your bills during coronavirus (COVID-19).](https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/articles/coronavirus-and-your-bills)   We have published a number of other factsheets that outline further support available:   * Factsheet for care leavers on Universal Credit during coronavirus (COVID-19) * Factsheet for care leavers whose employers have stopped trading during coronavirus (COVID-19) * Factsheet for care leavers who are self-employed, a contractor, freelancer or a gig-economy worker during coronavirus (COVID-19) * Factsheet for care leavers who are university students during coronavirus (COVID-19)- to follow * Factsheet for former Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) care leavers during coronavirus (COVID-19) – to follow * Factsheet for care leavers who are young, single or expectant parents during coronavirus (COVID-19) * Factsheet for care leavers on how to stay safe and maintain good emotional health and wellbeing during coronavirus (COVID-19) |