

Child maintenance arrangements made after speaking to Child Maintenance Options

Data up to March 2018

● Annual

Published: 31 August 2018
Great Britain

Experimental

Child Maintenance Options (Options) is a free service that provides impartial information and support to help parents make informed choices about child maintenance.

Overall, 225,700 parents had a conversation with Options this year. The estimates in this publication are based on telephone interviews with 5,600 of those parents.

We asked parents about their child maintenance arrangements and whether they were made after speaking to Options. We also asked parents if they thought their arrangements were working well.

Parents who contacted Options between February 2017 and January 2018 were surveyed at least two months after they called. Some of these parents were surveyed again in March 2018 to see if their arrangements had changed. We use this to assess the long-term effectiveness of Options in supporting parents to make child maintenance arrangements that work for them.

Main Stories

40,100

Between February 2017 and January 2018, Child Maintenance Options helped parents set-up **40,100 family-based arrangements**

92%

92% of these were still in place by March 2018

At a glance

Page

77% of parents who contacted Options in 2017 still had a child maintenance arrangement in March 2018

3

60% of parents who contacted Options in 2017 said their Child Maintenance Service arrangement was working well

6

89% of parents who contacted Options in 2017 said their family-based arrangement was working well

6

81,900 children were on functioning family-based arrangements in March 2018

7

Lead Statistician: Nicolette Lares

cm.analysis.research@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

DWP Press Office: 0203 267 5129

Feedback is welcome

Published 31 July 2018

Next edition in 2019

© Crown copyright

What you need to know

Child maintenance is support between separated parents to help with the everyday costs of looking after children.

Child Maintenance Options is a free service that provides impartial information and support to help separated parents make decisions about their child maintenance arrangements.

If they agree, separated parents can arrange child maintenance themselves. This is called a '**family-based arrangement**' and is a private way to sort out child maintenance. Parents arrange everything themselves and no-one else has to be involved. Family-based arrangements can be regular financial payments or flexible arrangements which may include a financial element or transactions in kind.

The Child Maintenance Service, which replaces the Child Support Agency (CSA), is for when parents can't agree a family-based arrangement. Parents wishing to use the Child Maintenance Service must first speak to Child Maintenance Options (Options) who can refer them to the Child Maintenance Service. For information on the performance of the Child Maintenance Service please see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-on-the-2012-statutory-child-maintenance-scheme>

Types of arrangements and Children on arrangements

Some child maintenance arrangements are **set up or changed after contacting Child Maintenance Options**. **Other** child maintenance arrangements are made before contact with Child Maintenance Options and do not change after contacting Options.

A family-based arrangement consisting of regular financial payments is counted as **functioning** if all or some of the agreed money is being paid. A family-based arrangement that contains non regular payments or payments in kind is considered to be **functioning** if the parent surveyed believes it is working fairly well or very well.

Children on arrangements means the number of children who a paying parent has a child maintenance arrangement for.

For more details see the Background Information document:

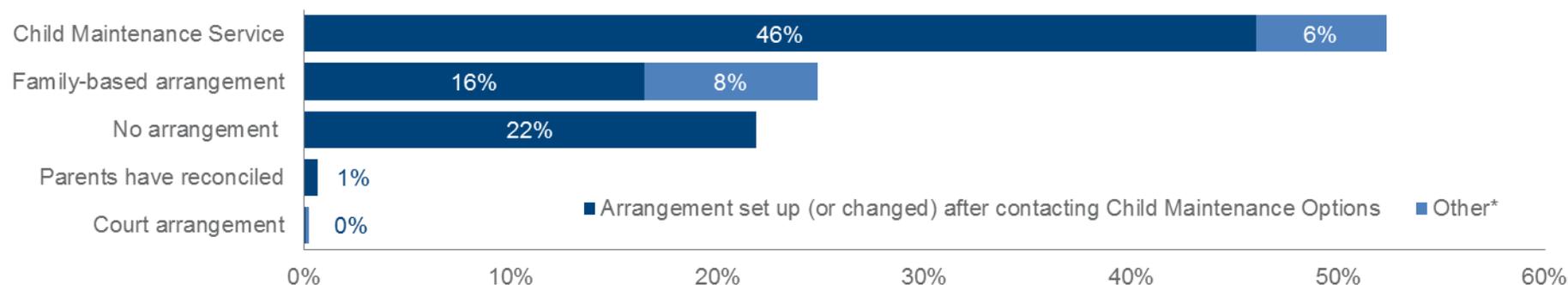
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/effective-family-based-child-maintenance-arrangements-statistics-background-information-and-methodology>

Child Maintenance Arrangements

We surveyed parents who contacted Options between February 2017 and January 2018 to ask about their Child Maintenance arrangement at least two months after they spoke to Options. In March 2018, some of these parents were re-surveyed to see if their child maintenance arrangements had changed. The results of these two surveys were combined to estimate the number of arrangements in place at the end of the year (see **About these statistics** for more details).

77% of parents who contacted Options in the year still had a child maintenance arrangement in March 2018

Types of child maintenance arrangements made by parents who contacted Child Maintenance Options between February 2017 and January 2018 and were surveyed in March 2018



25% of parents who contacted Child Maintenance Options between February 2017 and January 2018 had a family-based arrangement in March 2018. Around **16%** of all parents set up or changed their family-based arrangement after contacting Options, while **8%** already had a family-based arrangement or could not remember whether they made their arrangement before or after speaking to Options.

Not all parents with family-based arrangements will contact Child Maintenance Options so the true number of parents with family-based arrangements in society will be higher.

52% of the parents who contacted Options had an arrangement through the Child Maintenance Service and **22%** had not agreed a child maintenance arrangement. This is similar to previous years

See **Table 1** in the summary tables that accompany this publication for full data.

* 'Other' includes arrangements set up before a parent's most recent contact with Child Maintenance Options. It also includes arrangements where the parent cannot remember whether they set up the arrangement before or after they contacted Options.

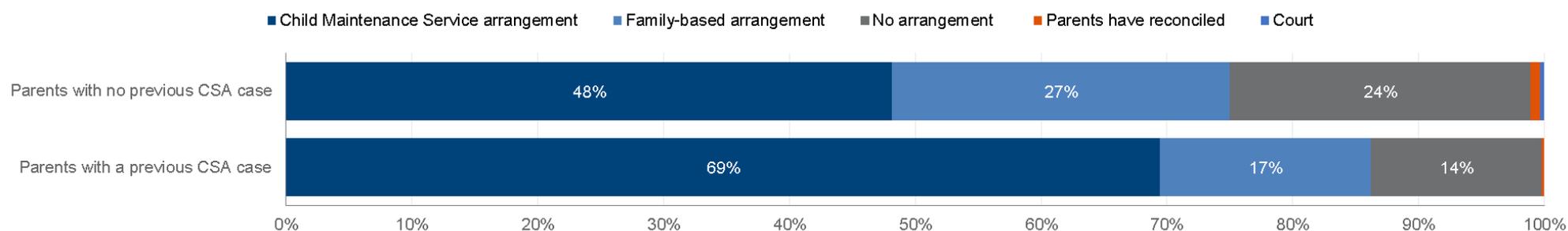
Parents with a previous Child Support Agency case

Parents who are looking for help managing their child maintenance arrangements can make an application to the Child Maintenance Service. The Child Support Agency (CSA) only handles historic child maintenance cases and is currently being closed down. Parents with a CSA case have been encouraged to contact Child Maintenance Options for support in agreeing a new child maintenance arrangement.

Further information and statistics on the performance and closure of the Child Support Agency can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/child-support-agency-quarterly-summary-statistics--2>.

69% of parents who had a CSA case and contacted Options ended up applying to the Child Maintenance Service

Child Maintenance Arrangements made by parents who contacted Child Maintenance Options between February 2017 and January 2018, surveyed in March 2018



69% of parents with previous CSA cases set up a new arrangement with the Child Maintenance Service following contact with Options. This is a statistically significant difference from the 48% of parents who do not have previous involvement with the CSA (see the “About these statistics” section for more details on statistical significance).

The remaining parents with previous CSA cases who contacted Child Maintenance Options either made a family-based arrangement, reconciled or did not set up a new child maintenance arrangement. 14% of parents with a previous CSA case who contacted Options reported having no arrangement. This is a statistically significant difference when compared with other parents, 24% of whom report having no arrangement.

Court arrangements made up less than 1% of all arrangements.

See **Table 2** for full data.

Parents with previous CSA cases are identified through calls to a dedicated Child Maintenance Options telephone number. Some parents with CSA cases may not use this number so the true percentages of arrangements made by parents with previous CSA cases may be different.

Family-based arrangements

If they agree, separated parents can arrange child maintenance themselves. This is called a ‘**family-based arrangement**’ and is a private way to sort out child maintenance. Parents arrange everything themselves and no-one else has to be involved. Family-based arrangements can be regular financial payments or flexible arrangements which may include a financial element or transactions in kind.

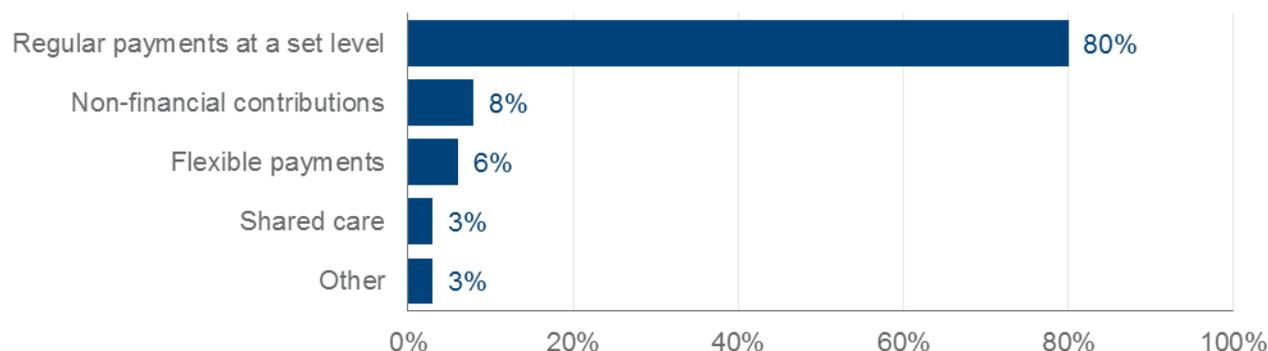
Options helped set up around 40,100 family-based arrangements in the year, 92% of these were still in place by March 2018

In March 2018, a sample of parents who contacted Options between February and October 2017 and had previously been surveyed were re-contacted to see if their child maintenance arrangements were still in place or if they had changed. These results were added to the survey results from parents who contacted Options between November 2017 and January 2018 to estimate the number of arrangements in place at the end of the year.

- In total, **40,100** family-based arrangements were made by parents following contact with Options in the year (between February 2017 and January 2018)
- By March 2018 there were **36,900** family-based arrangements in place.
 - **28,600** of the arrangements made between February and October 2017 were still in place by March 2018.
 - **8,300** family-based arrangements were made by parents following contact with Options between November 2017 and January 2018.
 - This means that of the **40,100** family-based arrangements made in the year, **92% (36,900)** of the arrangements were still in place.

80% of these family-based arrangements were made up of regular financial payments at a set level.

The type of family-based arrangements set up by parents who contacted Child Maintenance Options between February 2017 and January 2018 as of March 2018



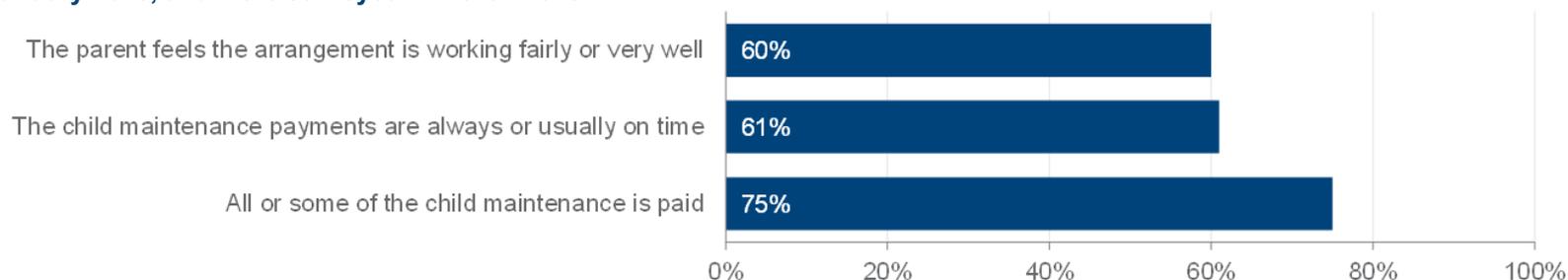
See **Tables 1, 3 and 4** for full data.

Parents views about their Arrangements

Parents in this survey are all asked whether they feel their child maintenance arrangements are working well. If the arrangement is made through the Child Maintenance Service or is a family-based arrangement which involves a financial element, parents are also asked whether the payments are being made on time and in full.

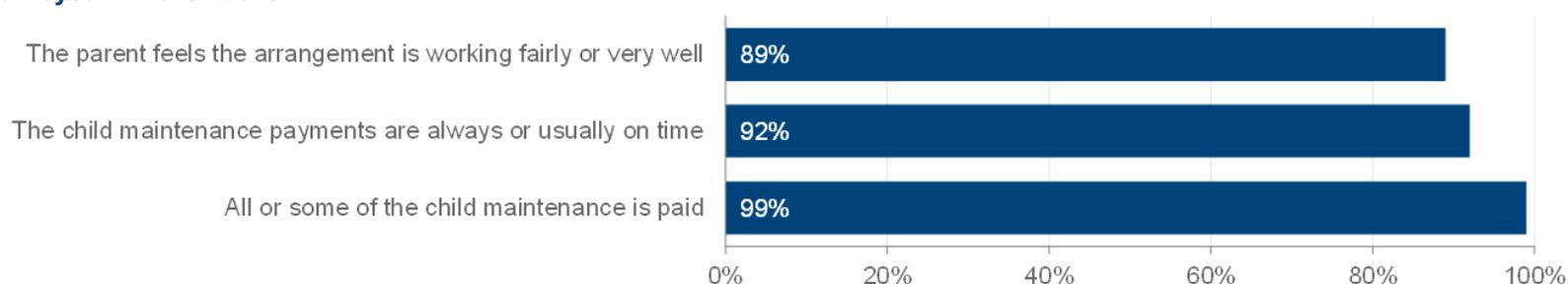
60% of parents who contacted Options in the year said their arrangement with the Child Maintenance Service was working well

Assessments of arrangements made through the Child Maintenance Service by parents who contacted Child Maintenance Options between February 2017 and January 2018, and were surveyed in March 2018



89% of parents who contacted Options in the year said their family-based arrangement was working well

Assessments of family-based arrangements by parents who contacted Child Maintenance Options between February 2017 and January 2018, and were surveyed in March 2018



36,900 parents had a family-based arrangement in March 2018 after speaking to Options in 2017 (February 2017 - January 2018). Of these, **89%** said it was working well in March 2018.

Out of the parents whose family-based arrangement involved financial payments, **92%** said their payments were on time and **99%** said payments were paid in full or in part.

- **92%** of parents with family-based arrangements which involve regular financial payments said at least some of the amount was paid **and** it was always or usually on time.

See **Tables 5 and 6** for full data.

Children on family-based arrangements

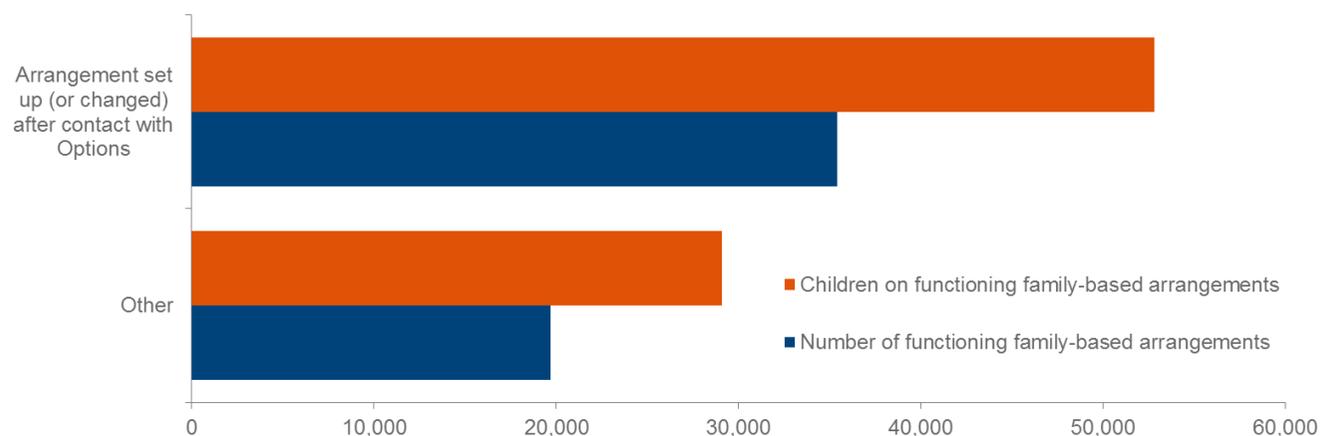
Options aims to support parents to set up arrangements that work for them. We ask parents about their arrangements to determine whether or not they are **functioning**.

A family-based arrangement consisting of regular financial payments is counted as **functioning** if all or some of the agreed money is being paid. A family-based arrangement that contains non regular payments or payments in kind is considered to be **functioning** if the parent surveyed believes it is working fairly well or very well.

For family-based arrangements consisting of regular financial payments, **children on functioning family-based arrangements** are children for whom a paying parent is contributing some or all of the due child maintenance. For family-based arrangements not consisting of regular payments it is the number of children on arrangements where the surveyed parent believes it is working fairly or very well.

81,900 children were on functioning family-based arrangements in March 2018

Functioning family-based arrangements and children on these arrangements for parents who contacted Child Maintenance Options between February 2017 and January 2018, surveyed in March 2018



In March 2018 there were **35,400** functioning family-based arrangements which were set up or changed by parents after contacting Child Maintenance Options between February 2017 and January 2018.

- **52,800** children were on these arrangements.

There were an additional **19,700** functioning family-based arrangements where the arrangement was set up before the parent contacted Options or the parents could not remember if they had set up their arrangement before or after they spoke to Options. These are classed as 'other' family-based arrangements. **29,100** children were on these arrangements in March 2018.

See **Table 7** for full data.

About these statistics

The data is produced through four quarterly surveys and one annual longitudinal survey conducted by Child Maintenance Options on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

In March 2018, a sample of parents who contacted Options between February and October 2017 and had previously been surveyed were re-contacted to see if their child maintenance arrangements were still in place or if they had changed. These results were added to the survey results from parents who contacted Options between November 2017 and January 2018 to try and understand the arrangements parents had setup throughout the year and how these had changed by March 2018.

The population is all separated parents who have had a full telephone conversation about their child maintenance needs with Child Maintenance Options.

- Certain types of customers are excluded from the sampling frame for practical purposes, including non-English speakers and parents who opt out of being contacted for research purposes.

In the quarterly surveys, the results are weighted to be representative of the number of parents who had a full telephone conversation about their child maintenance needs with Child Maintenance Options in that quarter. For the longitudinal survey, the results are weighted to be representative of the child maintenance arrangements parents said they had in the quarterly surveys.

A result is **statistically significant** if it cannot be attributed to chance. This publication measures statistical significance at the 95% level which means you would only expect to see the result caused by chance 1 in 20 times.

These statistics have been developed using guidelines set out by the UK Statistics Authority. These guidelines can be found here:

<https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/the-code/>

Changes to the publication

Previous publication included a figure for the overall number of children benefitting from family-based arrangements since Options began. This figure is not included in the current publication due to issues with the previous methodology. We are currently working on a new approach and will publish the results at a future date once this has been developed.

Where to find out more

This document and the summary tables can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/child-maintenance-arrangements-made-after-speaking-to-cm-options-march-2018>

Older releases: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/family-based-child-maintenance-arrangements-statistics>

How we plan to evaluate child maintenance reform: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/387584/child-maintenance-reforms-evaluation-strategy.pdf

The Child Maintenance Options website has further information on their work: <http://www.cmoptions.org/>

Information and statistics on the Child Maintenance Service can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-on-the-2012-statutory-child-maintenance-scheme>