

United Airlines Age Limit To Travel

Direct answer: On United Airlines, children **aged 5 to 14** travelling without a parent or guardian aged 18 or over **must** be booked into United's unaccompanied minor service, at a fee of **\$150 each way**. Children **under 5 cannot fly alone** at all. Teenagers **aged 15 to 17** may travel as ordinary passengers, with the unaccompanied minor service available optionally at the same fee.

The rule that shapes everything else: **United unaccompanied minors may only travel on nonstop United or United Express flights**. No connections at any age within the programme. That single restriction determines whether the trip is possible from your airport, and it is stricter than several competing airlines.

Because the nonstop requirement often means the obvious routing does not work, checking alternatives early matters. **1-888-374-4490 [US] (OTA)** can identify which nonstop options exist from your departure city.

The age bands

Age	Can they fly alone on United?	Unaccompanied minor service	Routing permitted
Under 5	No	Not available	None
5 to 14	Yes	Mandatory	Nonstop United / United Express only
15 to 17	Yes	Optional	All United flights, no routing restriction
18 and over	Yes, as an adult	Not applicable	No restriction

A child aged 5 to 14 is only exempt from the service if travelling with a parent or guardian **aged 18 or over** on the same flight. An older sibling of 16 does not qualify as an accompanying adult.

That produces an awkward and fairly common situation: a 14-year-old and a 16-year-old travelling together. The 16-year-old is treated as an independent passenger and the 14-year-old still requires the paid service. Families frequently discover this at the check-in counter, where it becomes a \$150 surprise and, occasionally, a denied boarding until the service is added.

The fee, and how it is counted

\$150 each way. A round trip is \$300, and the fee sits on top of the child's ordinary airfare.

The important nuance is how many children the fee covers, because it differs from some competitors: on United the **\$150 fee covers up to two children** travelling together on the same reservation. Delta's comparable fee covers up to four. For a family sending three or four children together, that

difference is material — on United, three children means paying the fee twice.

Other points:

- The fee is **non-refundable** once the child has flown
- It applies at the same rate whether the child is 5 or 14
- Teens aged 15 to 17 who opt in pay the same \$150 each way
- It **cannot be covered by travel credits**

What the fee includes: an assigned seat, preboarding, a complimentary food item where available, supervision by United staff on the ground and monitoring by cabin crew in the air, and a documented handover to the designated adult at the destination.

The nonstop rule

This is where United differs most sharply from its peers, and it deserves to be understood before you start pricing tickets.

United unaccompanied minors may travel only on nonstop United or United Express flights.

There is no age at which connections become permitted within the programme. Delta, by contrast, permits connections for children aged 8 to 14 and restricts only the 5-to-7 band to nonstops.

The practical consequences:

- If there is **no nonstop United flight** between the two cities, the trip cannot be made as a United unaccompanied minor at all
- Codeshare and partner flights are not an option
- A routing through a hub — Newark, Chicago, Denver, Houston, San Francisco or Washington Dulles — does not work for an unaccompanied minor

For families in smaller cities this is the whole ballgame. If your local airport has no nonstop United service to the destination, the realistic choices are driving the child to a larger airport that does, using a different airline whose policy permits connections, or having an adult travel with them.

Check the nonstop availability **before** anything else. Everything downstream depends on it.

Booking the service

United allows unaccompanied minor bookings online, which is more convenient than some airlines that require a phone call.

Step by step:

- 1 **Confirm a nonstop United or United Express flight** exists on your route and date.
- 2 **Search with "0" adults** and select the appropriate child age range on united.com. This signals an unaccompanied minor booking.
- 3 **Complete the child's details** exactly as they appear on any identification.

- 4 **Provide the drop-off adult's** full name, address, phone numbers and relationship to the child.
- 5 **Provide the pickup adult's** details in the same form.
- 6 **Pay the fare and the \$150 service fee** per direction.
- 7 **Review the confirmation** and check that the unaccompanied minor service actually appears on it — not merely that a child's age was entered.

That last step is the one that fails silently. A ticket booked with a child's date of birth but **without** the unaccompanied minor service attached will not be accepted at check-in, and the child will be denied boarding until the service is added.

Information you must have ready

- Child's full legal name and date of birth
- Drop-off adult: full name, address, mobile and alternate phone
- Pickup adult: full name, address, mobile and alternate phone
- A secondary emergency contact who is not travelling
- Photo identification for both adults at the airport

Both adults must present government-issued photo identification. **United will not release a child to anyone not named on the reservation**, regardless of family relationship or how convincing the explanation is. If the pickup person changes, the reservation must be updated before the flight — not on arrival.

What happens on the day

At departure. Arrive earlier than usual — allow at least two hours for a domestic flight. Check in at the counter, not online; the paperwork has to be completed in person. The child receives a wristband or lanyard and documentation. A gate pass is issued to the drop-off adult so they can accompany the child through security to the gate.

The drop-off adult must stay at the airport until the aircraft has departed. Not until boarding, not until pushback — until it is airborne. If the flight returns to the gate or the departure is cancelled, the child must be collected. Plan for a wait and park rather than using curbside drop-off.

Onboard. The child boards first, is introduced to the cabin crew, and is seated in a location crew can monitor easily. Crew check on them through the flight.

On arrival. The child stays on board until other passengers have disembarked, then a United employee escorts them to the designated pickup adult, who must show photo identification and sign for the handover.

Preparing the child

The programme handles logistics. Preparation handles everything else.

Pack a bag the child can manage alone — one they can lift, open and close without help. Medication, a change of clothes, a charged device with headphones, a book, snacks and a refillable water bottle.

Write the contact details on paper and put the card in a pocket. Phones lose charge. Names and numbers for both adults, plus the flight number, cost nothing and solve the worst case.

Walk through the sequence in advance — who they will meet, what the wristband is for, that a United employee stays with them, that the pickup adult needs identification. Children cope far better when nothing is a surprise.

Name the delay scenario explicitly. Tell them what happens if the flight is late: they remain with United staff, the pickup adult is contacted, nobody is leaving them anywhere. This is the fear that actually causes anxiety, and saying it out loud defuses it.

Feed them beforehand. Onboard catering on a short domestic flight may be minimal.

Common problems

Booking without the service attached. The most frequent and most costly error. Verify it on the confirmation.

Assuming a 16-year-old sibling counts as the accompanying adult. The threshold is 18.

No nonstop flight on the route. Discovered late, this can end the plan entirely.

Pickup person changed without updating the reservation. United will not release the child to an unnamed adult.

Last flight of the day. Sensible airlines discourage this because a cancellation leaves a child with nowhere to go. Book earlier departures where possible — a morning flight also has better rebooking options if something goes wrong.

Weather season. A December flight through a northern hub is a different proposition from a June flight. The nonstop rule helps here, but delays still happen.

Costs beyond the fee

The \$150 each way is the headline, but the nonstop requirement is often the larger expense.

Because United unaccompanied minors can only fly nonstop, the routing that qualifies may not be the cheapest routing available — or the most convenient. Families in cities without direct United service face a choice between driving to a larger airport, which adds fuel, time and possibly a hotel, or paying for an itinerary from a further airport at a higher fare.

Add the practical costs at both ends: parking rather than curbside drop-off, since the drop-off adult must stay until the aircraft is airborne. On a delayed departure that can be a long and expensive wait.

For families sending two children together the economics improve, since the \$150 covers up to two. For three or four children, budget for the fee twice.

Compare against an adult ticket. Two one-way unaccompanied minor fees total \$300. On some routes, buying an adult a round-trip ticket to accompany the child costs less than that — particularly on short, competitive routes. It is worth pricing before assuming the unaccompanied minor service is the economical choice.

How United compares with other airlines

Useful context if the nonstop rule is blocking your plans.

Delta permits connections for children aged 8 to 14, restricting only 5 to 7 to nonstops, and its \$150 fee covers up to four children. For a connecting itinerary or a larger family, Delta is materially more flexible.

American operates a comparable programme with its own routing rules and fee structure.

Southwest accepts unaccompanied minors on nonstop flights only, with a lower fee than United's.

Some carriers do not accept unaccompanied minors at all, and others stop offering the service once a child turns 12.

The point is not that United is worse across the board — its online booking is more convenient than several competitors — but that the nonstop-only rule is genuinely restrictive. If no United nonstop exists on your route, another airline may solve the problem outright rather than requiring you to redesign the trip.

Where to get help

Contact	Number	Best for
Travel reservations and unaccompanied minor bookings	1-888-374-4490 [US] (OTA)	Finding nonstop options from your airport, comparing airlines when no United nonstop exists, booking and confirming the service is attached
United Airlines Reservations	Published on united.com	Adding or amending unaccompanied minor service on a United ticket, updating pickup contacts
United accessibility desk	Published on united.com	Children with medical or additional needs

Calling is worth it for a first unaccompanied minor booking. Confirming that the service is genuinely attached to the reservation, that the flight qualifies as a nonstop under the rules, and that both adults' details are recorded correctly is faster with a person than by re-reading a confirmation email.

Frequently asked questions

What age can a child fly alone on United Airlines? From age 5, with mandatory unaccompanied minor service through age 14. Under 5 may not fly alone. From 15 the service is optional.

How much is United's unaccompanied minor fee? \$150 each way. The fee covers up to two children travelling together on the same reservation.

Can a United unaccompanied minor take a connecting flight? No. United unaccompanied minors may travel only on nonstop United or United Express flights, at every age within the programme.

Can a 15-year-old fly alone on United? Yes, as an ordinary passenger. The unaccompanied minor service is available optionally at \$150 each way.

Does an older sibling count as the accompanying adult? Only if they are 18 or over. A 16-year-old does not qualify.

Can I book United unaccompanied minor service online? Yes — search with "0" adults and select the child's age range on united.com. Verify the service appears on the confirmation.

Can someone other than the named adult collect the child? No. The reservation must be updated in advance. United will not release a child to an adult not named on the booking.

What if the flight is cancelled? The child remains under United's supervision and the listed contacts are called. This is why the drop-off adult must stay at the airport until departure and why earlier flights are preferable.

Is the fee refundable? No, once the child has flown.

The takeaway

United's age rules are straightforward on paper — under 5 no, 5 to 14 mandatory service at \$150 each way, 15 and over optional — but the **nonstop-only requirement** is the rule that actually decides whether the trip can happen. Unlike several competitors, United permits no connections for unaccompanied minors at any age, so families outside cities with direct United service need to plan around that from the start rather than discovering it at booking.

Two other details are worth holding onto: the fee covers **two** children rather than four, which matters for larger families, and the accompanying-adult threshold is **18**, which catches out households sending teenage siblings together.

Verify the service is attached to the confirmation, name the pickup adult correctly and early, and choose a morning nonstop over the last flight of the day.

To find out quickly whether a qualifying nonstop exists from your airport — or what the alternatives are if it does not — **1-888-374-4490 [US] (OTA)** can check the options in one call.