Partner Visa or Parent Visa: Which UK Family Route Fits Your Situation?

Understanding the Two Main Family Visa Pathways

When you are planning to bring a family member to the UK, two of the most common routes are the partner visa and the parent visa. Both fall under the UK's family immigration rules, but they serve different relationships and have distinct requirements. Choosing the right one depends on your personal circumstances, your immigration status, and the nature of your family ties. This article compares the two options so you can see which route may apply to you and what factors to weigh before applying.

What Is a Partner Visa?

A partner visa (also called a spouse or unmarried partner visa) is for someone who is married, in a civil partnership, or in a genuine and subsisting relationship with a British citizen or a person settled in the UK. The couple must intend to live together permanently in the UK. The applicant must meet several conditions, including the financial requirement, English language requirement, and provide evidence that the relationship is genuine and ongoing. This route can lead to indefinite leave to remain after a qualifying period, usually five years, provided the relationship continues.

What Is a Parent Visa?

A parent visa is for a parent of a child who is a British citizen or has lived in the UK for seven years or more. The parent must have sole or shared parental responsibility for that child, and the child must normally live in the UK. The parent must show they intend to play an active role in the child's upbringing. This route also has a financial requirement, though it is slightly different from the partner visa route. The parent visa can lead to settlement after a qualifying period, usually five years, provided the parent continues to meet the requirements.

Key Differences at a Glance

The most obvious difference is the relationship at the centre of the application. A partner visa focuses on a couple's relationship, while a parent visa focuses on the parent-child bond. But the requirements and evidence differ in several important ways.

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- **Relationship evidence:** For a partner visa, you need to prove you are in a genuine and subsisting relationship, usually through cohabitation evidence (like joint bank

statements, utility bills, tenancy agreements) and documents showing you have met in person, shared finances, and communicate regularly. For a parent visa, the focus is on parental responsibility and the child's residence in the UK, not on a romantic relationship.

- **Financial requirement:** Both routes have a minimum income threshold, but the parent visa may allow you to meet it through a combination of income, savings, and certain benefits. The partner visa typically requires a minimum income from employment, self-employment, or savings, with limited exceptions for those receiving certain benefits or where there are compelling circumstances.
- **Accommodation:** Both routes require you to have adequate accommodation for the family without recourse to public funds. You will need to provide evidence of where you will live, such as a tenancy agreement or proof of ownership, and show it is not overcrowded.
- **English language requirement:** Both routes require the applicant to demonstrate a basic knowledge of English (usually through an approved test or a degree taught in English). There are exemptions for those from majority English-speaking countries or those with certain disabilities.
- **Dependent child:** Both routes allow you to include a dependent child in the application, but the rules differ slightly. Under the partner visa route, the child must be under 18 and not married or in a civil partnership. Under the parent visa route, the child must be the one who qualifies the parent for the visa, and that child's immigration status is central to the application.

When the Partner Visa Suits You

The partner visa is the right route if you are married, in a civil partnership, or have lived together in a relationship akin to marriage for at least two years. The application requires strong evidence that you are in a genuine relationship and intend to live together permanently. You will need to show that you meet the financial requirement, which is currently set at a minimum income level (the exact figure changes periodically, so it is wise to check the latest Home Office guidance). If you do not meet the financial requirement through income alone, you can use savings or a combination of both.



One key consideration is that the partner visa requires you to have been in a relationship for a certain period, and you must have met in person. If you are in a long-distance relationship or

have only recently met, the Home Office may scrutinise your application more closely. The relationship evidence must be thorough: photographs, messages, travel tickets, and statements from friends or family can help, but official documents showing cohabitation or joint financial commitments carry more weight.

Another factor is the immigration status of the UK-based partner. They must be a British citizen, have indefinite leave to remain, or hold certain other immigration statuses. If they are still on a visa themselves, you may need to explore other options or wait until they obtain settlement.

When the Parent Visa Suits You

The parent visa is for a parent of a child who is a British citizen or has lived in the UK for seven continuous years. This route is often used by a parent who is separated from the child's other parent, or where the child lives with one parent in the UK and the other parent wants to join them. The parent must have sole or shared parental responsibility and must intend to take an active role in the child's upbringing. The financial requirement is more flexible here: you can meet it through income, savings, or certain benefits, and there is no minimum income threshold if the parent is receiving specified benefits that cover the child's needs.

This route is also suitable if you are a parent who has been living outside the UK and your child has already settled in the UK with the other parent or another guardian. You must show that you have maintained contact with the child and that it is in the child's best interests for you to be allowed to join them. The Home Office will consider the child's welfare as a primary consideration, so evidence of your involvement in the child's life is crucial.



Which Route Is More Straightforward?

Neither route is simple, but the parent visa can sometimes be more straightforward if the financial requirement is easier to meet through benefits. However, the partner visa has clearer guidance and a well-established case law. The key is to match the route to your exact circumstances. If you are in a genuine and subsisting relationship with a British partner, the partner visa is likely the right choice. If you are a parent of a British child and you are not in a qualifying relationship with the child's other parent, the parent visa may be your only option.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Both routes require careful preparation. One common mistake is providing insufficient evidence of the relationship or the child's residence. For a partner visa, failing to show cohabitation or a genuine relationship can lead to refusal. For a parent visa, failing to prove parental responsibility or the child's length of residence can be fatal. Another pitfall is not meeting the financial requirement. Even if you have a good relationship history, the Home Office will refuse the application if the income or savings fall short. It is essential to calculate the requirement accurately and to have the correct documents ready.

A family visa solicitor can help you navigate these requirements, but the decision ultimately depends on your facts. If you are unsure which route applies, a **family visa solicitor** can review your situation and advise on the best strategy. They can also help gather the right evidence and prepare the application to avoid common errors.

What to Do Next

Start by assessing your relationship or parental role. If you are in a partnership, consider whether you meet the financial requirement and have strong evidence of your relationship. If you are a parent, gather proof of your parental responsibility and your child's residence in the UK. Check the Home Office's latest guidance on both routes, as the rules and fees change over time. If you are in doubt, seek legal advice from a qualified immigration professional. They can give you a clearer picture of your chances and the steps you need to take.



Final Consideration

Both the partner visa and the parent visa are long-term routes that can lead to settlement in the UK. The choice between them is not always obvious, especially if you have a complex family situation. Think about the strength of your evidence, your financial position, and the immigration status of the family member you are joining. If you are eligible for both routes, compare the requirements and choose the one that gives you the best chance of success. For many people, the partner visa is the more natural fit, but if you are a parent of a British child and your relationship with the other parent has ended, the parent visa is the correct path.

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