

# Washington State's Child Support Program

## Check online or in the “Community Services Numbers” section of your local phone directory for these resources:

- Local Community Clinic
- Local County Health Department
- Crisis Clinic Hotline
- Pregnancy Aid
- Planned Parenthood
- Children’s Home Society
- LDS Community Services
- Catholic Community Services
- Mental Health Centers
- DSHS Community Services Office
- 2-1-1 The Washington Information Network
- OSPI, (GRADS Program)

## Other Suggested Resources for Unmarried Parents

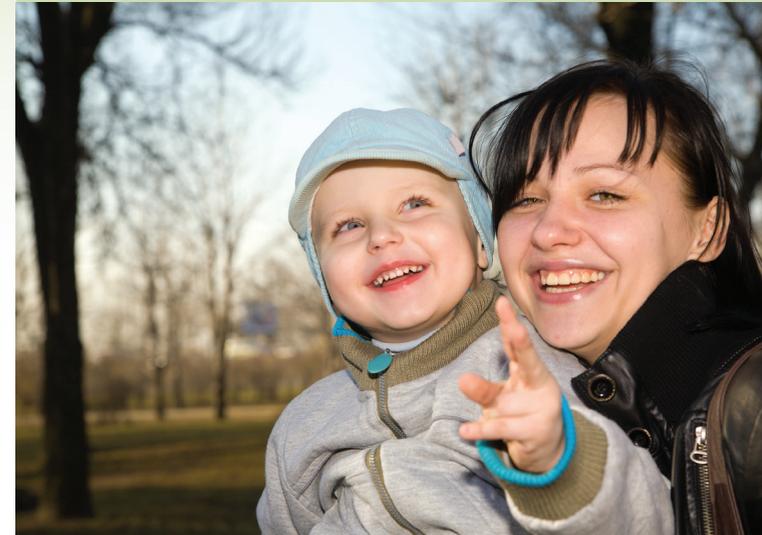
[www.washingtonlawhelp.org](http://www.washingtonlawhelp.org)

If you have questions about teen parenting, establishing paternity or collecting child support, you can contact an attorney to explore your legal options.

Your local Division of Child Support office can help, too. Visit the DCS website at:

[www.childsupportonline.wa.gov](http://www.childsupportonline.wa.gov)

- Headquarters** .....800-457-6202
- Seattle DCS**.....800-526-8658
- Tacoma DCS**.....800-345-9976
- Everett DCS**.....800-729-7580
- Yakima DCS** .....800-441-0859
- Spokane DCS** .....800-345-9982
- Olympia DCS** .....800-345-9964
- Wenatchee DCS** .....800-535-1113
- Vancouver DCS** .....800-345-9984
- Kennewick DCS** .....800-345-9981



# What Every Teenager Needs to Know About Paternity & Child Support



*Transforming lives*

DSHS 22-806 (Rev. 1/17)



*Transforming lives*

## What Every Teenager Needs to Know About Paternity and Child Support

Being a parent can be a wonderful and fulfilling experience. But parents also have many responsibilities. They provide their children with food, clothing, a place to live, education, and medical care. These responsibilities can be hard for anyone. They are even harder when you are a teen and unmarried. It is important to know some of the legal issues related to child support.

### What is paternity?

Paternity is the legal establishment of fatherhood.

### Why should we establish paternity?

- So the child can receive financial and medical support from both parents.
- So the child has access to the father's health history.
- So the child can receive Social Security and insurance benefits if the father is hurt or killed.
- So the parents can establish a parenting plan that specifies when the child resides with each parent if the parents do not live in the same household.

### I am a potential father. What do I need to know?

Paternity can be established through a court order, an Acknowledgment of Paternity or marriage.

### What is an Acknowledgement of Paternity?

An Acknowledgment of Paternity is a legal document signed by unmarried parents. This form legally establishes fatherhood. Either party may rescind (remove) their signature through a court action within 60 days of the date the Acknowledgment was filed. After 60 days the party must prove in court he or she signed the form as a result of fraud, duress or material mistake of fact.

*Note: If either of you signs an Acknowledgment while you are a minor, you have until your 19th birthday to challenge/rescind/remove the Acknowledgment through a court action.*

Paternity acknowledgment only establishes paternity. It does not address custody or visitation. It does not address where the child will live or how much time the child will spend with each parent.

### How is paternity established in court?

The mother or a man claiming to be the father can start a paternity action in court. Either one can ask the Division of Child Support (DCS) to establish paternity or DCS may send the case to the county prosecutor. The prosecutor interviews the mother to identify possible fathers and arranges for genetic testing.

### What is genetic testing?

Laboratory tests can prove conclusively whether or not the alleged father is the biological father of a child. A swab (which looks like a big Q-tip) is used to obtain genetic material from inside the cheek of the mother, father, and child.

### What happens if I ignore a letter from the prosecutor?

The case will go to court anyway and you may be named as the legal father of the child, which means that you are financially responsible for the child, and you will owe child support when you do not reside with the child.

### What if genetic tests show that I am not the father?

Your case will be dismissed, and the mother will be asked to name other possible fathers.

### How is the amount of child support set?

A child support order may be entered in court or by DCS. The order will set child support based on both parents' incomes and according to the Washington State Child Support Schedule.

### How does DCS collect child support?

If you are ordered to pay child support you should contact DCS to discuss payment options. DCS works with parents to make sure that child support payments are timely. DCS can make sure that a noncustodial parent's pay has child support deducted from it. DCS can also garnish bank accounts, unemployment compensation and disability payments; file liens; seize cars and other property; and refer cases to the prosecutor for contempt action. You may also have your driver's license or other license suspended if you fall behind on payments. DCS also intercepts tax returns.

### I am the mother. What are the most important things I need to know?

- Either parent can ask DCS to help establish paternity.
- Both parents have the right to help raise the child, and a court-ordered parenting plan will usually provide that the child spends a lot of time with both parents.
- If the child receives cash public assistance, DCS will automatically open a child support case. The parent receiving TANF must cooperate with DCS unless he or she notifies DSHS that pursuing paternity or child support would be dangerous for the custodial parent or the child.
- If the noncustodial parent pays child support while the child receives TANF, the state usually keeps all or part of the support payments as reimbursement.
- If current child support collections exceed the amount of the TANF grant, the assistance may end and then any child support collections will go to the custodial parent and the child.

