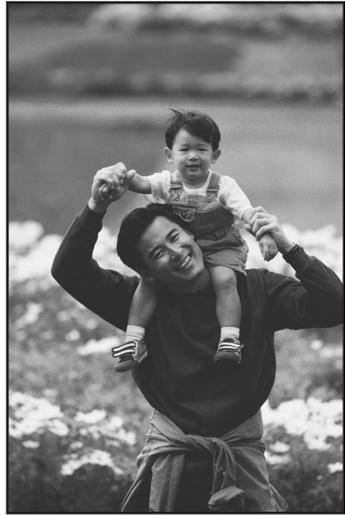


YOU GAVE YOUR CHILD LIFE.
GIVE YOUR CHILD A CHANCE.



SUPPORT YOUR CHILD
IN EVERY WAY.



Office of Child Support

FATHERHOOD

Taking Responsibility for Your Child

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR FATHERS

Parenting is one of the greatest responsibilities a person can undertake. Fathers and mothers bring important but different qualities to a child's life. All children need two parents, whether they live together or not, and all children need emotional and financial support from both parents.

As a father, you may be pulled in many different directions, and the challenge is to effectively balance those demands. However challenging life may be, being a dad is one of life's greatest pleasures. Children who have a dad in their life:

- Do better in school;
- Are less likely to join gangs;
- Have higher self esteem;
- Have fewer behavioral problems; and
- Are less likely to be involved with substance abuse.

What is "establishing paternity"?

When an unmarried woman has a child, an official act is needed to establish the legal father of the child. This is known as "establishing paternity," and it provides the child with a legal father. When a married couple has a child, the law automatically recognizes the husband as the child's legal father; therefore, the child's paternity (fatherhood) does not need to be established. It is possible that the legal father may not be the biological father.

Why is it important to establish the legal father of a child?

Fathers and mothers both have the right to know and the responsibility to support their children emotionally and financially even when they are not married to each other. Establishing paternity gives a child born to unmarried parents the same legal rights as a child born to married parents.

Children with legal fathers are entitled to the following:

- **Identity.** It is important to know who we are. Your child has the right to the sense of belonging that comes from knowing both parents. Also, when a legal father is established, the father's name can appear on the birth certificate.
- **Money.** The law requires both parents to support their children. This is true even with an unplanned pregnancy. Children supported by only one parent often do not have enough money for their needs.
- **Benefits.** Your child has the right to other benefits from both parents. These may include Social Security, insurance benefits (including medical), inheritance rights and veterans' benefits, as well as other types of benefits.
- **Medical Information.** Your child may need a complete medical history from the families of both parents. The medical history may include information about inherited health problems.

How is paternity legally established?

If the mother is married when she becomes pregnant or when the child is born, her husband is considered by law to be the father unless a court has determined that the husband is not the father.

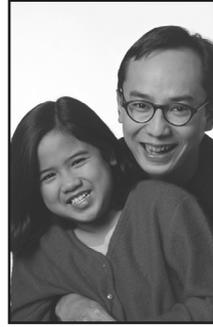
If the mother is not married when she becomes pregnant or when the child is born, paternity can be established voluntarily by the parents or a judge can declare a man the legal father of the child.



The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) does not discriminate against any individual or group because of race, religion, age, national origin, color, height, weight, marital status, genetic information, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, political beliefs or disability.

How can unmarried parents voluntarily establish paternity?

Unmarried parents can voluntarily acknowledge paternity by signing the Affidavit of Parentage form. Both parents need to provide a picture identification and Social Security number, if possible, before signing the form. The signatures must be notarized, which means they must be signed in the presence of a notary public.



What is the difference between a legal father and a biological father?

The legal father is not necessarily the biological father. Every child has a biological father, or birth father. The biological father is the man whose sperm joined the mother's egg to create the baby. The legal father is the man the law recognizes as the father of the child. The legal father is responsible for providing emotional and financial support for the child.



Her parents do not want me around, or she says the baby is not mine. What should I do?

If you believe you are the child's father, it is your right and responsibility to establish paternity, even if the mother or her parents don't want you to establish paternity. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) Office of Child Support can help you with the process of establishing paternity. Call (toll-free) 866-540-0008.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT VOLUNTARILY ESTABLISHING PATERNITY?

You accept the rights and responsibilities that come with raising a child when you voluntarily establish paternity. Those rights and responsibilities include:

- The mother has custody of the child unless otherwise determined by the court or agreed to by the parties in writing.
- Either parent may assert a claim in court for parenting time or custody.
- Both parents have a right to notice and a hearing regarding the adoption of the child.
- Both parents have the responsibility to support the child and comply with an order for child support.
- The parents give up their right to blood or genetic testing, a court-appointed attorney and a trial to determine if the man is the biological father of the child.

Can I visit my baby?

Parenting time, formerly known as visitation, is the first step to a healthy relationship between you and your child. If you and the mother cannot mutually agree on parenting time, the court can order parenting time. The order may include a parenting time schedule.

How can I be sure the baby is mine?

If you think the baby is not yours, and the mother says it is, it will be up to a court to decide. A hearing will be held where you and the mother can tell your sides of the story. The court may also order genetic tests to help establish paternity.

How can I get a genetic (paternity) test?

Michigan's child support program provides the opportunity to request a genetic test from the mother, the alleged father, or on behalf of MDHHS, if the child receives public assistance.

The State of Michigan contracts with a laboratory to provide genetic (paternity) testing at a reduced cost. To qualify for the reduced cost genetic testing, the mother, the alleged father and the child must have an open child support case, in which a court has not yet determined paternity. Parents who do not wish to start a child support case may also pay a private clinic or laboratory to obtain a genetic test.

Note: Parents with a Michigan child support case who choose a private clinic or laboratory to obtain a genetic test must provide a copy of the test results to the county Prosecuting Attorney or Friend of the Court that is handling their child support case.

What is DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid)?

DNA contains the hereditary information required for the development of every living thing on earth. Children inherit half of their DNA from their mother and half from their father. If the child's DNA does **not** match that of the alleged father, the man is excluded as the biological father.

How is genetic (paternity) testing performed?

The most common method for a genetic test is a DNA test. In a DNA test, DNA samples are taken from the child, the alleged father and the mother.

In a DNA test, an authorized sample collector rubs a cotton-tipped swab on the inside cheek of the mouth to obtain cheek cells that contain DNA material. The laboratory can also obtain DNA from a blood or tissue sample. The laboratory will then test and compare the details of the child's DNA sample with the details in the mother's and alleged father's DNA samples to indicate the likelihood that a man is, or is not, the biological father of a child.

Who pays for the genetic (paternity) testing?

A court decides who will pay for genetic testing. A court usually orders the alleged father to pay the costs if he is found to be the father.

Will I have to pay child support?

If you are found to be the father, you will be expected to financially contribute to the support of your child as stated in the court order. Child support is set by the Michigan Child Support Formula. This formula considers both parents' income, the number of children and the time the child spends with each parent. Medical costs for the child may be included in the child support order.

Will I have to pay child support if I live in another state?

Yes, you will have to pay child support if you live in another state. Under federal law, states help one another to:

- Establish paternity;
- Obtain child support orders; and
- Ensure that parents who do not have custody pay their court-ordered child support.

Where can I go for help?

For more information on establishing paternity, call the Michigan Office of Child Support (toll-free) at: 866-540-0008. You can also apply online for child support services at <https://www.michigan.gov/micase>.

