

WHEN TEENS BECOME PARENTS...



THINK ABOUT IT!

Facts about the legal and financial responsibilities of parenthood

LOVE

You know being a kid isn't easy. It's even harder if you don't know your mom or dad. Both parents need to provide love and emotional support to their kids. Whether they're doing homework, learning to ride a bike, or dealing with everyday issues, your kids will need your support. Are you prepared to be a loving parent—and be there whenever your child needs you?

RIGHTS

Kids have a right to information about their family. They need to know family medical history, be able to access social security and insurance coverage, and they have a right to inheritances from both parents.

MONEY

Having a child means a financial commitment that lasts a lifetime. As your child grows up, he or she deserves to be loved and financially supported by both parents.



California
Department of
Child Support
Services

SUPPORTING A BABY TAKES WORK



My baby's father and I aren't married, but we love each other. Do I really need to worry about child support now?

Yes, because sometimes situations change. To protect your baby's future, you should establish paternity (fatherhood). Signing a Declaration of Paternity is the fast, free and easy way to make sure your baby's father is recognized. Both parents can sign the declaration at the hospital when the baby is born. Or, they can do it later at the county Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) or the county welfare department. To make sure your child gets the support needed, you should also get a court order for child support. The DCSS can give you the information.

What do I need to do when my baby's mom wants child support from me?

After a child support case is opened with the county Department of Child Support Services (DCSS), you'll receive legal papers called a "summons and complaint." You must respond. You may talk about the case with the county DCSS. You can do this by calling or by going to the department's office.

Their telephone number and address is on the papers. Remember that you can always bring a lawyer with you.



I don't get along with the baby's mom. What will happen if I refuse to pay child support?

The laws are tough on people who don't pay their support. Your driver's license privilege may be denied or suspended. Or, your credit may be damaged, which means you can't buy the things you want like a stereo or a car. If you want to be a teacher or contractor someday, you may not be able to get a professional license because of unpaid child support. If you're lucky enough to win the lottery, your luck won't last long. The state will keep the money to pay child support that's owed. Last of all, you can even go to jail.

What if I know who the father of my baby is but he won't admit it?

If he denies being the father, your county Department of Child Support Services will use swab tests to help determine paternity (fatherhood). Tests include DNA samples from the possible father, the mother and the baby. The tests are very accurate. If you aren't married to the father, his name can't be placed on the birth certificate until paternity is established.



BOTH PARENTS ARE RESPONSIBLE



My baby's daddy left town after I had our child and I don't know where he lives now. How will the state find him?

Any information you can give to your county Department of Child Support Services will be helpful. Driver's license records, social security numbers and work records are used to find parents who should be paying support. Information about the noncustodial parent can also be gathered from unemployment and income tax records and law enforcement files. If the parent has moved to another state, the Child Support Enforcement Office in that state will work to locate the parent.

How long does it usually take to get an order for the other parent to pay child support?

If the county Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) knows where to find the other parent, you can usually get an order for child support within 90 days. However, if the county DCSS must also establish paternity, or if your case has to go to court, then the county DCSS has 12 months to complete all the necessary steps and get a child support order.



I can't pay child support because I'm in school and I don't have a job.

Just because you're in school doesn't mean your financial obligation to your child goes away. While child support is usually based on your income, a court order could determine that you have the ability to work, at least part time, while you are attending school. The amount of the support order would be based on your earning ability.

Is it true that money to pay child support can be taken right out of my paycheck?

Yes. If you're already under a court order, the county Department of Child Support Services will collect what you owe for each month plus payments on back child support if you're behind. Up to 50% of your take-home pay can be withheld. If you're not under an order, you'll be called in to the department office to talk about your income. Then, a court order will be set up for you to begin paying.



SUPPORT YOUR CHILD



I'll pay child support, but the mother won't let me spend hardly any time with my child. What should I do?

After paternity and custody are established, you may have a right to see your child according to the terms of your custody agreement. If the mother won't let you see the child, contact your local Family Court Services at the county's Superior Court for help.

I've heard that my baby's father won't have to pay support if he's in the service.

That's not true. Joining the military doesn't mean he can avoid his responsibilities to his child. The child support investigator will contact the military authorities to enforce a court order for child support payments.



Can I get child support services while I'm pregnant—before my baby is born?

Yes. You can start the paperwork to establish paternity when you are pregnant. If the man you believe is the father denies it, genetic tests can be ordered after your baby is born. Genetic tests can be scheduled by your county Department of Child Support Services.

THINK ABOUT IT



California Department of
Child Support Services
Toll-free (866) 249-0773
TTY Toll-free (866) 223-9529
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*For more information, contact
your county Department of
Child Support Services*