

# For your child's sake . . . Establish Paternity

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## Your Child Deserves the Support of Both Parents

Both parents are responsible for supporting their child. The first step in taking care of a child is to legally establish paternity.

## How Can I Establish Paternity?

Establishing paternity means legally determining the father of the child. If the parents are not married to each other when the child is born, the child does not have a legal father unless paternity is established. The easiest way is for both parents to sign a form saying that the child is theirs. A court also can establish paternity by determining the father's identity. Either way, paternity can be established at any time for a minor child.

## What if I'm Not Sure who the Father Is?

A genetic test can determine who is the father. The test is easy and takes only a few minutes. It involves gently wiping the inside of the mouth with a swab. Samples must be taken from the mother, the child and the man who is believed to be the father. Testing information is available through the Florida Department of Revenue.



## Establishing Paternity Helps your Child

Establishing paternity will give your child the same rights and benefits as children born to married parents.

These rights and benefits may include:

- Legal proof of each parent's identity.
- Information on family medical history in case of inherited health problems.
- The child knowing the identity of both parents.
- The father's name on the birth certificate.
- Medical or life insurance from either parent (if available).
- Support from both parents, including financial and medical support, Social Security, veteran benefits and military allowances (if applicable).
- Inheritance.

## How Do Parents Benefit from Establishing Paternity?

Establishing paternity gives the father and mother legal rights. You can:

- Seek an order for support.
- Seek a court order for custody or visitation.
- Have a say in some legal decisions about the child.



## How Long Will it Take to Establish Paternity?

Signing a form saying that you are the parents of the child takes just a few minutes. If genetic testing is required, it could take about four to six weeks after the mother, father and child are tested to get the results. If both parents don't sign the form and a court has to determine who the father is, then it could take three months or longer, depending on the court's schedule or other reasons. Signing the form is the fastest and easiest way to establish paternity.

## What if I Am a Parent Under 18 Years of Age?

Parents who are minors can sign the paternity form. You should get the permission of your parents or legal guardian before signing the form.

## What if I Don't Work or if I'm in School?

You can establish paternity in the same way as anyone else.

## What if the Other Parent Lives in Another State?

Paternity can be established, but it usually takes longer because the Department of Revenue must work with the other state.

## It's Easy to Establish Paternity

There are three simple steps to establish paternity without going to court.

### STEP 1:

#### Get a form.

You can get a "paternity acknowledgment" form at a:

- hospital or birthing center.
- county public health unit.
- Department of Children and Families office.
- Department of Revenue, Child Support Enforcement office.
- Office of Vital Statistics.

### STEP 2:

#### Read the form.

The form has **important** information you should know **BEFORE** you sign. Be sure you read and understand the information before you fill out and sign the form.

### STEP 3:

#### Sign the form.

You must show a photo ID when you sign. After both parents sign the paternity form, your child has a legal father. If you are parents of a newborn and sign the form at a hospital or birthing center, it doesn't cost you any money. If you sign the form after you leave the hospital, you may have to pay a small fee to have the birth certificate amended to include the father's name.

## What Happens after Paternity Is Established?

After paternity is established, support payments and medical insurance may be ordered for the child. The amount of support is based on both parents' incomes using guidelines set by state law. It is important for both parents to cooperate with the Department of Revenue's Child Support Enforcement Program so children in need can be helped as quickly as possible. When custodial parents don't cooperate, they may have their case closed or have their public assistance benefits denied.

## For More Information on the Child Support Enforcement Program

Visit our web site at

<http://www.myflorida.com/dor/childsupport>

or call **1-800-622-KIDS**(1-800-622-5437)

Except: Dade County 305-530-2600

Manatee County 941-741-4039

The information in this brochure is based on Florida and federal laws. For specific legal advice, you should consult an attorney.



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## Child Support Enforcement

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Florida Department of Revenue