
Establish Paternity...



...for your child's sake!

Questions and Answers for Dads

CONGRATULATIONS ON BECOMING A FATHER!

This booklet has been written for fathers who are not married to the mother of their baby. There is also a booklet like this one written for mothers. In it you will find important information about establishing paternity for your baby.

Paternity is the legal identification of the father of a child. Each hospital and birthing center in Connecticut is required by law to offer unmarried parents the opportunity to establish their baby's paternity. To establish paternity of a child, the mother and the father must sign Form VS-56, Acknowledgment of Paternity. Your name cannot be placed on the birth certificate unless you sign this form.

If you would like to have your baby's paternity established, please ask to speak to the hospital staff who are knowledgeable about completing voluntary paternity acknowledgments.

In this booklet, you will find a series of questions and answers that will tell you what paternity is, why it should be established, and how easy it is to do.

Both you and the mother must sign Form VS-56 in front of a notary public. Hospitals have a notary public available, or will tell you when one will be available. Your baby's paternity is not established unless both you and the mother sign the necessary form and the form is filed with the Department of Public Health and forwarded to the appropriate superior court.

A sample copy of what a completed form VS-56 looks like is also included. If you have questions on the form, please talk to hospital staff who are trained to help you and the mother of your baby complete it.

If you would like information about other child support services, please call the Connecticut Department of Social Services Child Support unit nearest you. A list of the office addresses and telephone numbers is on page 13. These offices can also help you establish paternity if you do not do it at the hospital, or if you have other children whose paternity has not yet been established.

Your name will be placed on the birth certificate once you sign the Acknowledgment of Paternity.

Please read this booklet and consider having your baby's paternity established at the hospital. If you have questions, ask to speak to the hospital staff.

We wish you and your baby much health and happiness.

Sincerely,

Your local hospital,
The Department of Social Services, and
The Department of Public Health

Questions
dads
usually ask...

ESTABLISH PATERNITY *for your child's sake!*

Q. Why is having a child such a big deal?

A. Because it takes a lot of hard work. Having and raising a child *is* a big deal! Becoming a father *is* a big deal! Children need lots of love and attention. Raising a child takes time and money, but can be very rewarding. Even though you are not married to the mother, you should give your child the opportunity to have the emotional and financial support he or she needs.

Q. Paternity? What's that?

A. Paternity means fatherhood. Establishing paternity means legally determining the father of a child. When the parents are not married, paternity can be established by the mother and the father voluntarily signing paternity forms. The mother signs Form VS-56, Acknowledgment of Paternity. The father signs the Acknowledgment of Paternity section of the same form. Signing this form indicates that both parents agree that they are the child's parents. This form must be filed with the Paternity Registry maintained by the Department of Public Health, and forwarded to the appropriate court clerk where the acknowledgment then becomes a court order.

Q. What's so important about establishing paternity?

A. There are many benefits for your child from establishing paternity. Paternity gives your child . . .

- A chance at a father-child relationship. You both deserve the opportunity to develop, enjoy, and grow in this relationship.
- A sense of identity and belonging.
- Increased likelihood to know about any diseases or disorders that exist in your family, many of which may not show up at birth or in childhood.

How to establish paternity

- Entitlement to your financial and economic benefits, such as child support payments, health insurance, Social Security, pensions and veterans benefits.
- The right of inheritance when you die.

Q. How do I establish paternity for my child?

A. It's easy. All you and the mother have to do is complete form VS-56, Acknowledgment of Paternity. Once this form is signed and registered with the Department of Public Health (DPH), paternity will be legally established. The form may be completed in the hospital when a child is born, or at the local state Department of Social Services (DSS) office.

Another way to establish paternity is through legal procedures in a Connecticut Superior Court. This may cost you money and will take longer than an acknowledgment.

Q. Where can I get the Acknowledgment of Paternity form?

A. You can get Acknowledgment of Paternity form from any hospital or birthing center. You can also get the form at any DSS office listed in this booklet, and at DPH.



Q. What if I have questions about the forms, or about paternity?

A. The Notice of Rights and Responsibilities is part of the Acknowledgment form, and has information to help you. A copy of this section has been included in the booklet for you. If you need more help, hospital staff can direct you to someone who will be able to answer your questions about paternity. They will also know how to complete the form, and can answer any other questions you may have. DSS staff can also help you.

Q. I'm not even 18 yet. What do I do?

A. As the father of the child, you can still sign an Acknowledgment of Paternity that will be legally binding even though you are under 18 years old. You may wish to discuss this matter with an adult before you sign the acknowledgment.

Q. What about my child's birth certificate? Will my name go on it?

A. Yes, your name can go on the child's birth certificate, but only if both you and the mother sign the Acknowledgment of Paternity.

Remember, the child's birth certificate is an important legal document, and does establish legal paternity after the Acknowledgment of Paternity form is signed by both the mother and you.

When you fill out the birth certificate form it is important to both you and your child that the information be as accurate and complete as possible. Your child's birth certificate will be used throughout his or her life. It is the document most often used to prove the child's full given name, place of birth, and date of birth. It also gives information about names and other personal items of identification needed to prove citizenship, to get a passport, and to allow someone to inherit when





**Visitation
Rights
and
Custody**

a parent dies. It is also used for entrance to school, work permits, a driver's license, employment, entrance into the armed services, a marriage license, public assistance benefits, retirement pensions, and Social Security benefits.

Q. What about my child's last name?

A. When you and the mother of your child complete the birth certificate papers together, hopefully you will agree on the child's first, middle and last name. If you do not agree, however, the mother can choose **any** name she wants for the child.

Q. Can I sign an Acknowledgment of Paternity form later?

A. Yes. You can sign one at any time. However, if your child begins receiving public assistance, the state will contact you to sign the Acknowledgment of Paternity form or they may begin a court action to establish paternity if you do not cooperate.

If you do sign an Acknowledgment of Paternity later, a new birth certificate may be prepared for your child that will include information provided by you as the father. This is not done automatically. You and the mother will need to request that these changes be made. This request must be made at the Department of Public Health. The address is given on the form. You and the mother will be notified when the new birth certificate, with your name added, is available at the town hall. The new birth certificate will be available in the town where the child lives, and in the town where he/she was born.

Q. Will establishing paternity guarantee me visitation and custody rights?

A. No. Signing the acknowledgment does not guarantee visitation and custody rights. Hopefully, you and the child's mother will agree on visitation and custody. However, if you do not agree, both you and the mother have the right to go to court and have the Superior Court determine visitation and custody. You can do this only after

Fathers Help Support Their Children

paternity has been established. A judge will decide what's in the best interest of your child. Judicial Branch Family Services Unit staff are available to answer questions about custody and visitation. Office locations and phone numbers are provided on page 14 of this booklet.

You will have a much better chance of developing a relationship with your child if you acknowledge paternity.

Q. Will I have to pay child support if I sign the Acknowledgment form?

A. Yes, but only after a court enters an order for child support payments. By signing Acknowledgment of Paternity form you are agreeing that you are the child's father and you are legally responsible for supporting the child. The amount of child support you have to pay is based on what you earn. The court also considers the mother's income and day care expenses. You may also be requested to provide health insurance for your child if it is available to you at a reasonable cost. More information on determining how much you will have to pay is found in the "Child Support and Arrearage Guidelines" which you can obtain at any Court Clerk's office.

Q. I don't think I should be responsible for child support because the mother told me she was using birth control.

A. Even if the pregnancy was unplanned, you are responsible for supporting your child. It doesn't matter whether you agreed to the pregnancy or not. Both you and the mother have a responsibility to provide support for the child.

Q. If I don't sign the forms, will I have to pay child support?

A. You will be asked to pay child support once paternity is established, whether voluntarily or through court action. If you do not agree you are the father and public assistance or child support services are provided to your child the State may bring a court action against you to establish paternity.



Solutions for difficult situations

If public assistance is not being provided to your child, the child's mother can go to court on her own or request child support services from DSS to legally establish paternity. When your case goes to court, the court can order genetic tests of you, the mother, and the child to determine if you are the father. Genetic testing is very accurate. If the court determines that you are the father, you will most likely be ordered by the court to pay child support and provide health insurance for your child, based on your ability to pay.

Q. How can I be sure it's my child?

A. If you have any reason to believe the child is not yours (even if the mother says it is), genetic tests can be taken to determine if you are the father. If you deny paternity and your case goes to court, the court can order genetic tests of you, the mother, and the child. Genetic tests can also prove that you are not the father.

Q. Who pays for the genetic tests?

A. If you ask for genetic tests, you will have to pay for them unless the court finds that you are unable to pay. If you deny paternity and the court orders the tests, and you are found to be the father, you will have to pay for the tests unless the court finds you are unable to pay.

Q. If I deny paternity, what rights do I have?

A. You have the right to have your case decided by the court. If you are not sure that you are the father of the child, you do not have to acknowledge paternity. You have the right to refuse to admit paternity and request genetic tests, and to have a court hearing at which you could be represented by an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, you can request the court to appoint one for you.



Q. I'm unemployed. Do I still have to pay child support?

A. As a parent, you have the responsibility to support your child as best you can. The court may require you to get a job so that you can meet such responsibility. Your unemployment benefits could also be attached.

Q. I'm in school full-time and I don't have a job. Do I still have to pay child support?

A. As a parent, you have the responsibility to support your child to the best of your ability. You're a student now, but someday you'll have a job. The court may require you to get a job so that you can contribute to your child's support even while you are in school.

Q. Do I have to pay child support if I don't live in the same state as my child?

A. Yes. All states have laws to collect child support payments from parents who live in another state. If the mother receives child support services from this state, DSS staff will ask the other state to enforce your child support obligation if you don't pay, or bring you to court in that state to order support payments.

Establishing paternity for older children

Q. What if I just won't pay?

A. If there is a court order against you to pay child support and you don't pay, you're breaking the law. Most court orders require immediate income withholding, so if you have a job money will be taken from your paycheck. DSS can also take your federal and state income tax refund, put a lien on your property, and report you to a credit bureau. The Support Enforcement Division (SED) can take you to court for civil contempt or criminal nonsupport. The court could order you to go to jail. If the child's mother receives child support services from the state and there is no support order, court action can be taken against you to establish an order.

Q. How can I establish paternity for my other child(ren)?

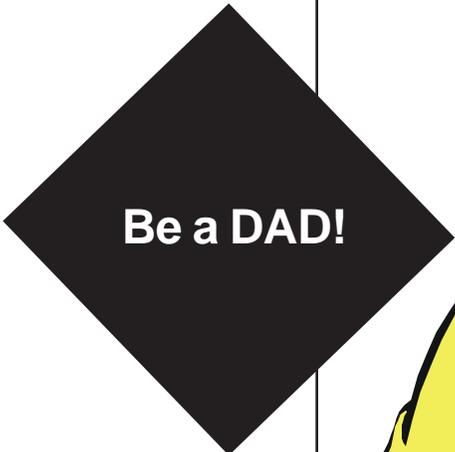
A. If you have not yet established paternity for other children, you and the child's mother can sign paternity papers at any time. Remember, it's just as important for older children to have their paternity established as it is for babies. Hospital staff **cannot** assist you with paternity for your older children the way they can for your new baby, but they **can** give you the necessary form to establish paternity for your other children. You and the mother should complete the form, sign it in front of a notary public, and return it to the Department of Public Health (DPH) to be entered into the Paternity Registry.

Notary publics can usually be found at clerks' offices, banks, and DSS regional offices. Once an Acknowledgment of Paternity is filed with the Paternity Registry, you will need to request that a new birth certificate be issued for your child, showing your name as his/her father. If you would like a copy of the Acknowledgment of Paternity after it has been filed with the court you will need to request a copy from the clerk of the court where the papers were filed.

If your child was born in another state, the child support unit can let you know who to call in the other state to get information about establishing paternity. Call the DSS office nearest you if you have **any** questions about establishing paternity for your baby or an older child. DSS Child Support regional office addresses and telephone numbers are listed on page 13 of this booklet.

Q. Where can I get legal advice ?

A. The hospital staff or DSS staff can give you information, but they **cannot give you legal advice**. For legal advice, you should consult an attorney. The information in this booklet is based on laws in effect in the State of Connecticut as of October 1, 1997.



Be a DAD!



Where can I get more information about child support services?

If you want general information about child support services the Connecticut Department of Social Services has an automated telephone line called VOICES. Call toll-free **1-800-674-8872** anytime between 6:00 a.m. and midnight, seven days a week. (You need a "tone" push button telephone.)

If you would like to apply for child support services, or if you have specific questions concerning establishing paternity or child support services, please call the office listed below nearest where you live.

Bridgeport:	925 Housatonic Ave., 06604; (203)551-2703
Danbury:	342 Main St., 06810; (203) 207-8986
Hartford:	3580 Main St., 06120; (860) 723-1002
Manchester:	699 E. Middle Turnpike, 06040; (860) 647-1441
Middletown:	117 Main St. Ext., 06457; (860) 704-3120
New Britain:	270 Lafayette St., 06053; (860) 612-3440
New Haven:	194 Bassett St., 06511; (203) 974-8248
Norwich:	279 Main St., 06360; (203) 823-3325
Stamford:	1642 Bedford St., 06905; (203) 251-9417
Torrington:	62 Commercial Blvd., 06790; (860) 496-6900
Waterbury:	249 Thomaston Ave., 06702; (203) 597-4171

What about access, visitation, and custody regarding my child?

If you have specific questions concerning access, visitation, and custody issues, please call the Judicial Branch Family Services Unit office listed below nearest where you live.

Bridgeport: 1061 Main St., 06601; (203) 579-6513

Bristol: 131 N. Main St., 06010; (860) 583-1835

Danbury: 146 White St., 06810; (203) 207-6815

Derby: 106 Elizabeth St., 06418; (203) 735-9595

Enfield: 111 Phoenix St., 06082; (860) 741-3697

Hartford: 18 Trinity St., 06106; (860) 566-3140

Litchfield: P.O. Box 307, 06759; (860) 567-9463

Manchester: 410 Center St., 06040; (860) 643-2481

Meriden: 54 West St., 06450; (860) 238-6140

Middletown: 1 Court St., 06457; (860) 343-6460

Milford: 14 West River St., 06460; (203) 877-0001

New Britain: 74 Vine St., 060 ; (860) 827-7130

New Haven: 235 Church St., 06510; (203) 789-7903

New London: 70 Huntington St., 06320; (860) 443-2826

Norwalk: 17 Belden Ave., 06852; (203) 847-5826

Putnam: 50 Canal St., 06260; (860) 928-0478

Stamford: 123 Hoyt St., 06905; (203) 965-5282

Vernon: 428 Hartford Tpke., 06066; (860) 872-4088

Waterbury: 300 Grand St., 06702; (203) 596-4018

The Department of Social Services' programs are available to all applicants and recipients without regard to race, color, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, disabilities, learning disabilities, national origin, ancestry or language barriers.

The Department has a TDD/TTY line for persons who are deaf or hearing impaired and have a TDD/TTY: 1-800-842-4524. Auxillary aids are also available for blind or visually impaired persons.

The Department of Social Services is an equal opportunity, affirmative action employer.

Published by
The Public & Government Relations Office
Connecticut Department of Social Services
Publication No. 95-18, May 1998

