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# Establish Paternity...



*...for your child's sake!*

*Questions and Answers for Moms*

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# *CONGRATULATIONS ON BECOMING A MOTHER!*

This booklet has been written for mothers who are not married to the father of their baby. There is also a booklet like this one written for fathers. 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. The father's name cannot be placed on the birth certificate unless he signs 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 father 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 father 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 about the form, please talk to hospital staff who are trained to help you and the father complete the form.

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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 14. 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.

You should know that the father's name will not be placed on the birth certificate unless he signs the Acknowledgment of Paternity. Signing Form VS-56 legally establishes paternity for your baby.

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  
moms  
usually ask...

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## 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 mother *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 father, you should give your child the opportunity to have the emotional and financial support needed from a father.

*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 papers. 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. These forms must be filed with the Paternity Registry maintained by the Department of Public Health (DPH), and forwarded to the appropriate court clerk where the acknowledgment then becomes a court order.

*Q. If I'm afraid he will hurt me or my child. Do I have to name the father ?*

A. You **DO NOT** have to tell hospital staff who the father of your child is. However, if you apply for public assistance from the state, you will be required to name the father. If you are afraid to name him because he may cause harm to you or your child, your state caseworker will explain the exemption policy to you.



**How to  
establish  
paternity**

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*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. They 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 the father's family, many of which may not show up at birth or in childhood.
- Entitlement to the father's financial and economic benefits, such as, child support payments, health insurance, Social Security, pensions and veterans benefits.
- The right to inherit from the father when he dies.

*Q. How do I establish paternity for my child?*

A. It's easy. All you and the father 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. These forms may be prepared 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. You can also get the form at any DSS office listed in this booklet, and at DPH.

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*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 mother 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 an acknowledgment.

*Q. What about my child's birth certificate? Can the father's name go on it?*

A. Yes. The father's name can go on the child's birth certificate, but only if both you and the father 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 you and the father.



## Visitation Rights and Custody

When you fill out the birth certificate forms 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 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 father of your child complete the birth certificate papers together, hopefully you will agree on the child's first, middle and last name. As the mother, you may choose **any** name (first, middle and last) you want for your child.

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

A. Yes. You can sign it at any time. However, if you apply for public assistance, you will be required to sign the Acknowledgment of Paternity if you haven't already. You can get an Acknowledgment of Paternity form from any DSS office. Staff from any DSS office can help you complete it.

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 father 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.



**Fathers  
Help  
Support Their  
Children**

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*Q. Will establishing paternity guarantee the child's father visitation and custody rights?*

A. No. Signing the acknowledgment does not guarantee visitation and custody rights. Hopefully, you and the child's father will agree on visitation and custody. However, if you do not agree, both you and the father have the right to go to court and have the Superior Court determine visitation and custody. The father can do this only after paternity has been established. A judge will decide what's in the best interest of your child. Judicial Branch staff in the Family Services Unit are available to answer questions about custody and visitation. Office locations and phone numbers are provided on page 15 of this booklet.

*Q. Will the father have to pay child support if we sign the forms?*

A. Yes, but only after a court enters an order for child support payments. By signing the Acknowledgment of Paternity form the father is agreeing that the child is his. As the father, he is legally responsible for supporting the child in accordance with the Connecticut Child Support and Arrearage Guidelines. The amount of child support a father has to pay is based on how much he earns. The court also considers the mother's income and day care expenses. The father may also be responsible for providing health insurance for the child if it is available at a reasonable cost. A copy of the guidelines may be obtained at the Superior Court Clerk's office nearest you.

*Q. If my child's father won't sign the paternity forms voluntarily, will he still have to pay child support?*

A. If public assistance is provided to your child at any time, or if you request child support services from DSS, the state will attempt to establish paternity. Once paternity is established, the father will be asked to pay support. If the father denies paternity, the state will take the father to court to establish paternity and child support.

If public assistance is not being provided to your child and you have not requested child support services, you can go

## Solutions for difficult situations

to court on your own or hire an attorney to help you legally establish paternity. If your case goes to court, the court can order genetic tests of you, your child and the alleged father, to determine if he is the father. Genetic testing is very accurate. If the court finds that he is the father, he will most likely be ordered by the court to pay child support and provide health insurance for your child.

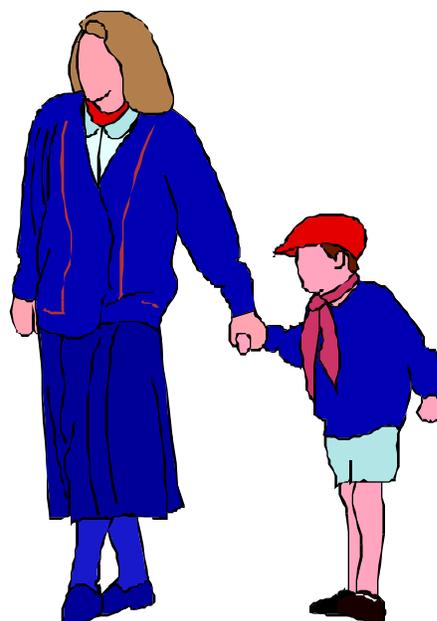
*Q. Do I need to establish paternity now if the father and I are getting along and he is helping me support our child?*

A. Yes, you should establish paternity now. Even if the father agrees to help support the child now, he may change his mind or become disabled or even die. There are other benefits that are only available if paternity is established, for example, Social Security, veterans' and insurance benefits for your child.

*Q. Do I have to name the child's father and establish paternity? What if I'm not sure who the father is?*

A. You must name the child's father if you receive public assistance from the State. If you're not sure who the father is, the child support unit staff can help you. You will be asked questions by child support staff or staff of the State Attorney General's office about the man or men who may be the father to determine which man to pursue. It is important that you give as much correct information as possible. If you refuse to name the father, or refuse to help in the process of establishing paternity, you may not be granted public assistance, or be removed due to your lack of cooperation.

If you do not receive public assistance and have requested child support services to establish or collect child support payments no action can be taken unless you name the child's father. Paternity must be established before payment of child support can be ordered.



*Q. What if he denies he's the father?*

A. You will need to go to court if the father denies paternity. You will be expected to testify in court and tell the court who the father is. The court can order genetic tests of you, the father, and the child. Genetic tests can also be used to prove that he is not the father.

*Q. Who pays for the genetic tests?*

A. If the father asks for the genetic tests, he may have to pay for them unless the court finds that he has no ability to pay. If the court orders the genetic tests, and he is found to be the father, he will have to pay for the tests unless the court finds he has no ability to pay.

*Q. He thinks the pregnancy is my fault and he should not be responsible for child support. He told me I should have been using birth control.*

A. Even if the pregnancy was unplanned, the father is legally responsible for supporting the child. It doesn't matter whether he agreed to the pregnancy or not. Both you and the father have a responsibility to support the child.



**Parental  
Responsibility  
includes  
moms *and* dads**

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*Q. Will he have to pay child support if he doesn't live in the same state as his child?*

A. Yes. All states have laws to collect child support payments from a father who lives in another state. Paternity must be established first.

*Q. I am going to marry someone else and he is going to adopt my child, so why establish paternity?*

A. Adoptions can take a long time. Sometimes plans to marry fall through. In the meantime, your child is entitled to child support and the other benefits that come with establishing paternity.

*Q. My child's father is unemployed. Does he still have to pay child support? Why should I bother?*

As a parent, the father has the responsibility to support his child. He may not have a job now, but his situation could change. The court may require him to get a job so that he can contribute to his child's support. He may be required to make payments if he is collecting unemployment benefits. You should establish paternity whether or not the father is working.

*Q. My child's father is still in school and doesn't have a job. Why should I establish paternity?*

A. As a parent, the father has the responsibility to support his child. He's a student now, but someday he'll have a job. The court may require him to get a job so that he can contribute to his child's support even while he is in school. You should establish paternity whether or not the father is employed.

## Establishing paternity for older children

*Q. What if he just won't pay?*

A. If there is a court order for child support and he doesn't pay, he's breaking the law. Most court orders require immediate income withholding, so if he has a job, money will be taken from his paycheck. If you are receiving child support services, the Support Enforcement Division (SED) or the DSS child support unit can take court action against him. His federal and state income tax refund can be taken, a lien can be put on his property, he may be reported to a credit bureau, and he may be brought before the court for civil contempt or criminal non support. The court could order him to go to jail.

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

A. If you have not yet established paternity for an older brother or sister of your new baby, you and the child's father can sign paternity papers at any time for the other child(ren). 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 papers 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 father should complete the form, sign them in front of a notary public, and return them to the Department of Public Health (DPH) to be entered into the Paternity Registry.

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

**Other  
Child Support  
Services  
Available  
from the  
State**

Call the DSS office nearest you if you have **ANY** questions about establishing paternity for your baby or older children. DSS regional office addresses and telephone numbers are listed on page 14 of this booklet.

*Q. Where can I get legal advice ?*

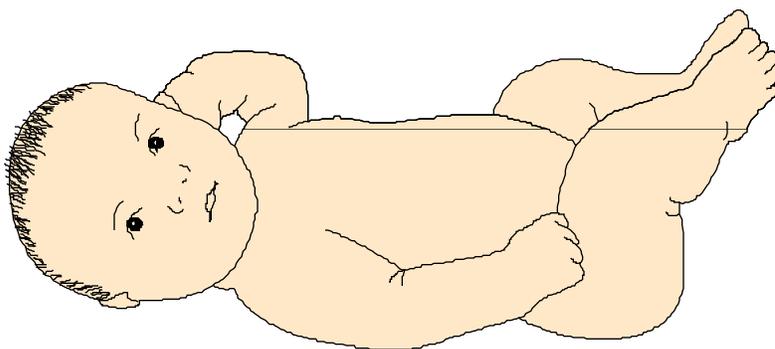
A. The hospital staff or DSS staff can give you information, but they **cannot give you legal advice**. Child support services available from the State do not include legal assistance concerning visitation and custody. For legal advice, you should consult an attorney. The information in this booklet is based on laws in effect in the State of Connecticut as of October 1, 1997.

*Q. What other services are available ?*

A. Full child support services are available to the custodial and noncustodial parent. These services include:

- location of an absent parent
- paternity establishment
- support order establishment and modification
- enforcement and collection of court orders.

Call the DSS office nearest you and ask the Child Support Unit to send you an application for child support services. On your appointment date, bring the completed application with you to the interview. A child support worker will go over the application with you. Based on your income, a fee may be charged or waived. All of these services are provided already if you are receiving public assistance.



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*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
Bristol:	45 North Main St., 06010; (860) 314-6546
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
Meriden:	55 W. Main St., 06450; (860) 640-6068
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
Norwalk:	7 Concord St., 06854; (860) 855-2776
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
Willimantic:	676 Main St., 06226; (860) 465-3500

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*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., 06053; (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.

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Published by  
The Public & Government Relations Office  
**Connecticut Department of Social Services**  
Publication No. 95-19, May 1998

