

How do I know if I'm the father?

If a child is born to a married woman, her husband is presumed (believed) to be the father of the child. If a child is born to an unmarried woman, the child does not have a legal father unless the parents take steps to identify a legal father. This is known as establishing paternity. Parents can establish paternity at any time until a child turns 23 years old. Paternity even can be established if the parent lives in another state or country. The mother or the assumed father can request a paternity test.

It is very important for a father to establish paternity. Paternity establishment is the first step to help set up parenting time rights or, in some cases, to gain legal custody. It is a required step in establishing a child support order and health benefits to ensure the child is receiving what he/she needs.

3 Ways to Establish Paternity

- **Complete an Acknowledgment of Paternity Affidavit.**

If the assumed father and mother are absolutely sure that he is the father, they can complete an Acknowledgment of Paternity Affidavit. Parents can complete this at the hospital, their local child support enforcement agency (CSEA) or their local health department. If there is any doubt, either party can request genetic testing.

Complete the Acknowledgment of Paternity Affidavit only if the father is certain that he is the father.

- **Request genetic testing at your county child support enforcement agency**

If there is any doubt of who the child's father is, genetic testing can be arranged, usually for free, at the local CSEA. The results will generally be available within 21 days or less. If the DNA results indicate a 99 percent or greater probability of paternity, the CSEA will issue an administrative order establishing paternity.

If there is any doubt, request genetic testing.

- **Obtain a court order requiring the mother, father and child to submit to genetic testing**

In juvenile court or sometimes domestic relations court, a court order can be used to establish legal paternity. In some cases, both the mother and assumed father agree to the child's paternity at the start. In such cases, they can enter into an agreement establishing legal paternity rights. This will become the court order.

Don't ignore notices from the court or your child support enforcement agency. If an alleged father is notified of a paternity hearing but does not appear in court, the judge can determine paternity by default, declaring that the man is the father of the child.



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