DOES PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT GIVE A FATHER RIGHTS TO CUSTODY OR VISITATION?

The mother and father may agree on custody and visitation without court involvement. If they don't agree, a court must settle the matter.

WILL ONE OF THE PARENTS HAVE TO PAY SUPPORT?

When the parents voluntarily sign an *Affidavit Acknowledging Paternity*, there is no order for support or medical coverage. FSD–CSE or a court can enter an order for support at the request of a parent or the child's custodian. The parent who does not live with the child is usually required to provide financial and medical support. State law sets the amount of support. It is based on the needs of the child and both parents' income and ability to pay.

WHAT IS THE PUTATIVE FATHER REGISTRY?

The Putative Father Registry records the names and addresses of fathers (or men who believe they are fathers) of children born outside of marriage.

WHY SHOULD A FATHER PUT HIS NAME ON THE PUTATIVE FATHER REGISTRY?

The Putative Father Registry allows a man to "officially" claim he is the father of a child. A man may want to do this before paternity is legally established if he can't find the child's mother or if the mother doesn't want to establish paternity for the child.

The Putative Father Registry is used in adoption proceedings to identify the child's father and promptly secure his consent to proceed with the adoption. A man who is concerned that his child may be adopted without his consent should place his name on the Putative Father Registry before the child's birth, or within 15 days of the child's birth, in order to be notified of an adoption proceeding for the child.

HOW IS A MAN'S NAME ADDED TO THE PUTATIVE FATHER REGISTRY?

A man's name is automatically added to the Putative Father Registry when an order is entered saying he is the legal father or when both parents complete an *Affidavit Acknowledging Paternity.* A man can also add his name to the Putative Father Registry by filing a *Notice of Intent to Claim Paternity* with the Bureau of Vital Records. Filing this notice doesn't establish legal paternity, but it does create an official record of the man's claim to be the father of a child. A man should contact the Bureau of Vital Records if he wants to add his name to the registry. Staff at this office will help the man complete the form so he can add his name to the registry.

For more information about birth certificates or the Putative Father Registry contact:

Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services
Bureau of Vital Records
P.O. Box 570
Jefferson City, MO
65102-0570

(573) 526-1537

For more information about paternity, child support, or genetic tests contact:

Department of Social Services
Family Support Division
Child Support Enforcement
P.O. Box 2320
Jefferson City, MO
65102-2320

1-800-859-7999
www.dss.mo.gov/cse/

TDD: 1-800-735-2966
VOICE: 1-800-735-2466

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Does Your Child Have A Legal Father?

Paternity information for moms and dads

WHAT IS PATERNITY?

Paternity means fatherhood. If parents are married, the husband is considered to be the father of a child born during the marriage. A child whose parents aren't married has no legal father unless the parents establish paternity.

WHY SHOULD PATERNITY BE ESTABLISHED?

WELL-BEING

Fathers are an important part of their children's lives. When both parents share the responsibilities of parenthood, children are more likely to stay off drugs, finish high school, stay out of jail, delay pregnancy and earn more money as adults.

IDENTITY

It is important to everyone to know who their parents are. Knowing both parents can give a child a sense of belonging.

MEDICAL

Children need to know if they have inherited any special health problems. If a child develops a serious medical condition, it may be necessary to identify relatives with compatible blood or tissue types. Employers usually require paternity to be established before a father can add his child to his health insurance plan.

FINANCIAL

Both parents should support their children. Children supported by only one parent are more likely to live in poverty than children supported by both parents. If paternity is not established for a child, the child is not legally entitled to support from the father.

BENEFITS

Children often receive benefits from both parents. These may include health and life insurance, inheritance rights, Social Security benefits and veteran's benefits. Usually, paternity must be established before a child can receive these benefits from the father.

HOW IS PATERNITY ESTABLISHED?

- The easiest way to establish paternity is for both parents to sign an *Affidavit Acknowledging Paternity* at the hospital when the baby is born. Hospital staff give this form to parents who are not married. If both parents complete the form before the hospital files the child's birth certificate, the father's name is added to the child's birth certificate and the man becomes the legal father.

- If the parents don't complete an *Affidavit Acknowledging Paternity* in the hospital, it's not too late. They can contact the Bureau of Vital Records or the Family Support Division – Child Support Enforcement (FSD–CSE) to get an Affidavit. Staff at these offices will help parents complete the form so the father's name can be added to the child's birth certificate and the man can become the legal father.

- If either the mother or the man who believes he may be the child's father are not absolutely sure who the biological (natural) father is, a genetic test should be done. A genetic test is done by collecting tissue samples from the mother, the man and the child. Tissue samples are usually collected by rubbing the cheeks inside the mouth with a swab. The samples are then sent to a laboratory for testing. If the results of the genetic test show at least a 98 percent probability that the man is the father, then Missouri law says he is the presumed father.

- A genetic test to determine paternity may be obtained through FSD–CSE, and either the mother or the man who believes he may be the child's father can apply for this service. When a case is opened with FSD–CSE, the state of Missouri will pay for the cost of the genetic test. If the man is found to be the biological (natural) father, he **may** be required to repay the state for the test.

- If the mother or the father don't agree to establish paternity, either parent can ask FSD–CSE for help. Either parent can also talk with a private attorney. When the parents don't agree to establish paternity, FSD–CSE or a court can order the genetic test at the request of a parent or the child's custodian. Once the genetic test has been completed, FSD–CSE or the court may enter an order establishing paternity without the consent of the parents.

WHAT LAST NAME GOES ON THE CHILD'S BIRTH CERTIFICATE?

When a baby is born to an unmarried mother, the mother can give the child a last name she chooses. Usually, when the parents agree who the father is, they will agree on a last name. This is easiest to do at the hospital when the child is born. If paternity is established after the mother leaves the hospital, the child's last name may be changed when completing the *Affidavit Acknowledging Paternity*. If the parents decide to change the last name after the father's name has been added to the birth certificate, a court order is required.

HOW LONG AFTER A CHILD IS BORN CAN PATERNITY BE ESTABLISHED?

Parents can voluntarily establish paternity for their child by completing an *Affidavit Acknowledging Paternity* any time after their child's birth, regardless of the child's age. If the parents do not agree to establish paternity, one of the parents can bring an action to establish paternity for the child at any time up to the child's 18th birthday. Children can bring an action to establish paternity for themselves between the ages of 18 and 21.