
What is Paternity?

Paternity means fatherhood. If the parents are married, the husband is considered to be the father of the children born during the marriage. If the father and mother are not married, legal steps must be taken to establish paternity.

Why establish (acknowledge) paternity?

IDENTITY

All children have the right to know their mother and father and to have a relationship with both parents. A sense of identity and belonging helps a child develop emotionally. Parenthood can give the mother and the father a sense of responsibility and accomplishment.

MEDICAL

By acknowledging paternity, the child may be able to find out if he or she has inherited diseases or disorders. The child may also be eligible for the mother's/father's health insurance.

MONEY / FINANCIAL BENEFITS

Legal paternity allows the child to qualify for benefits from the father such as Social Security, veterans benefits, inheritance rights, life and health insurance, and child support.

How is Paternity established?

- Parents complete a legal form called the Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity (VAoP) and sign the form in front of a notary public.
- Court Order (if either parent has opened a case with the local Child Support Office, the local Child Support Office can file all the necessary papers to get a Court Order, which may include DNA testing.)

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- DNA testing (Either parent or the local Child Support Office can request a DNA test if biological proof of paternity is wanted before a man is named the legal father.)

After obtaining DNA results, paternity can be established by either entering a VAoP or Court Order.

When and where can paternity be acknowledged?

The best time for parents to acknowledge paternity is at the hospital when the child is born. This gives the child a legal father right from the start. It also puts the father's name on the child's original birth certificate. The hospital staff will explain the paternity acknowledgment process and provide the legal form. You can also view the VAoP video ahead of time at: <http://tn.gov/humanservices/article/child-support-establishing-paternity>

If the paternity form is not signed in the hospital or you have an older child that you want to establish paternity for, the mother and father can go to their local Health Department, Child Support Office or the State Office of Vital Records to sign the form.

Each parent must sign the form in the presence of a notary public, although they do not have to do it at the same time. When you sign the Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity, you must provide the following:

1. A picture I.D., such as a driver license.
2. Your Social Security number.

What if there are doubts about who the father is?

If either parent has any doubts about who the father is, the VAoP form should not be signed. DNA tests can be done to determine whether a man is the father. The local Child Support office can give you more information, or you can call the TN VAoP Hotline at 1-800-457-2165.

What are your rights as a parent?

Signing the paternity form is voluntary. If parents are unmarried at the time of their child's birth, the mother is presumed to have custody.

Legal parents have the right to have a relationship with their child and to visit their child. Once a father acknowledges paternity, he gains these rights. If parents cannot agree on custody or visitation, parents may obtain a Court Order.

What are your responsibilities as a parent?

Both parents are required to support their child from birth. This may include child support, health insurance and/or child care expenses. Every father and mother who brings a child into the world should accept his or her share of the financial, legal and emotional responsibility.

What if parents acknowledge paternity but later change their minds?

Parents should think carefully before acknowledging paternity. If either parent changes his or her mind, he or she have 60 days to rescind (cancel) the acknowledgment in writing.
