



## ESTABLISHING PATERNITY

In Pennsylvania, when a child is born to unmarried parents, there is no legal relationship between father and child. Paternity must be established for a legal relationship to exist. Pennsylvania child welfare law requires welfare clients to establish paternity unless there is “good cause” such as a domestic violence situation to not do so.

There are several reasons for establishing paternity:

1. Children who have father figures are more likely to stay in school and avoid drugs and crime. They are more likely to grow up being responsible adults.
2. Paternity must be established before your child’s birth certificate will show the name of the father.
3. The child will have access to his or her father’s medical history. This is important to the child’s health.
4. The child’s father may be required to pay child support and provide health insurance coverage.
5. If the child’s father becomes disabled or dies, the child may be eligible for Social Security benefits.
6. The child may have the right to inherit property from the father’s estate.
7. The child may be entitled to father’s life insurance benefits.
8. If the father is in the military or was previously employed by the military, the child may be eligible for medical coverage and life insurance benefits.

There are two ways to establish paternity. A mother and father can sign a form called “Voluntary Acknowledgement of Paternity.” These forms are available at hospitals and birthing centers as well as county assistant offices. The Domestic Relations office of the county court can also help parents establish paternity.

The second way to establish paternity is through the courts. If a man does not admit to being the father the Domestic Relations Office can help file a petition with the county court, naming the man believed to be the father and requesting a child support order. A support conference will be scheduled. At the conference, the man will have a chance to admit to being the child's father. If he does not do so, a genetic test may be ordered by the court to determine if he is indeed the father. The publications, *Establishing Paternity for Your child at Birth* and *Establishing Paternity for Your Child at Any Age* can be obtained at <http://www.dpw.state.us/child/childsupport>.

The Child Welfare Professional should follow this process in establishing a father's paternity in their case work practice:

1. Ask the mother to identify the child's biological father.
  - a. Ask for a name of the father and his address and telephone number
  - b. Ask for a copy of the child's birth certificate
2. Ask the father if he is the child's father. If he agrees that he is the father, the agency treats him as the child's father.
3. If either the father or mother denies the father's paternity, a blood test or oral swab to establish paternity must be done.
4. The blood test or oral swab will only confirm, this man is the child's father, or rule out he is not the child's father. There is no way to identify the biological father without one of these tests.

