

Child Support Handbook

FOREWORD



The child support program is a federal/state/local/tribal partnership to collect child support: We want to send the strongest possible message that parents cannot walk away from their children. Our goals are to ensure that children have the financial support of both their parents, to foster responsible behavior toward children, and to emphasize that children benefit when both parents are involved in their lives.

The federal child support program was established in 1975 under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act. It functions in all states and several tribes and territories, through the state/county Social Services Department, Attorney General's Office, or Department of Revenue. Most states work with prosecuting attorneys, other law enforcement agencies, and officials of family or domestic relations courts to carry out the program at the local level. American Indian and Native American tribes, too, can operate child support programs in the context of their cultures and traditions with federal funding.

State and tribal child support programs locate noncustodial parents, establish paternity, establish and enforce support orders, modify orders when appropriate, collect and distribute child support payments, and refer parents to other services. While programs vary from state to state, their services are available to all parents who need them.

The federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It helps states develop, manage, and operate their programs effectively and according to federal law. OCSE pays the major share of state program operating costs, provides location services, policy guidance and technical help to enforcement agencies, conducts audits and educational programs, supports research, and shares ideas for program improvement.

This Child Support Handbook is a guide to help you get the child support payments your children need and deserve. Although it is written for parents who are working through state and tribal child support offices, it will also be useful to those working with private attorneys.

We dedicate this Handbook to the millions of parents who put their children first by responsibly providing for their emotional and financial support.



We have organized the Handbook so that you can refer directly to the sections you need. Your state or tribal child support program is available to help:

- Find a noncustodial parent: **Finding the Noncustodial Parent**
- Establish legal fatherhood for children: **Establishing Fatherhood**
- Establish and maintain a fair, financial and medical support order: **Establishing the Support Order**
- Enforce support orders: **Collecting Support**
- Distribute the money that is collected: **Where the Money Goes**
- With interstate, tribal, and international enforcement: **Working across Borders**

To ensure that children have *parentage* established and to establish fair child support payments, state and tribal child support programs provide:

- Voluntary in-hospital paternity acknowledgement
- *Genetic testing* at the request of either party in disputed paternity cases
- Child support *guidelines* for determining child support orders established in each state
- Review of child support orders at least every three years at the request of either parent

Tools that are available to collect child support include:

- *Income withholding*
- Revocation of drivers, professional, recreational and occupational licenses of parents who are not current in their child support payments
- Seizure of assets, including financial accounts
- Liens on property
- Denial of passports
- Federal and state tax refund offset

To ensure that state and local child support offices have access to information, the federal government operates the Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS), which includes the *Federal Case Registry (FCR)* and the *National Directory of New Hires (NDNH)*. The FPLS has access to information from state and federal government agencies. The FCR maintains caseload information from all states and territories.

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) has a [website](#) with current information about the child support program, policy matters, a list of [state and tribal office addresses](#) with links to state websites, and a [frequently asked questions](#) section. The web address is www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css.



The more you take an active role in learning about the child support program and getting information to your caseworker, the more success you will have in obtaining regular and full child support payments for your children.

To learn more about how the program will work for you, or to apply for child support services, call your local child support office. Check the county listings in your telephone book to get the telephone number, or call or write the state or tribal child support agency.

If you have access to the internet, there is a listing of child support agencies at: www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css/resource/state-and-tribal-child-support-agency-contacts

Información sobre el cumplimiento del sustento de menores en español está disponible en: www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css/resource/nuestros-hijos-nuestra-responsibilidad

* Words in *italics* are defined in our online [Glossary](#).



For information about your specific child support case or how the child support system works in your state or tribe, contact your [state or tribal child support agency](#).

For general information about the child support program, contact the Office of Child Support Enforcement, 370 L'Enfant Promenade, SW, Washington, D.C. 20447, or visit our [website](#) at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css. OCSE does not have case-specific information.