



Questions about Child Support

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Who Enforces a Child Support Order?

There are two ways to get and/ or seek enforcement of a child support order when a non-custodial parent won't pay a fair share of expenses. An order can be pursued through civil court or an administrative order can be set up through Child Support Enforcement.

You can hire an attorney, or you can ask for help through the Child Support Enforcement Program— generally the less costly option. It is important to know what costs and fees you will be expected to pay, if any, before entering into an agreement with Child Support Enforcement.

If you receive TANF or medical support from the state, you automatically get help with child support, and you are required to cooperate with the State in collecting it. You or your child may be exempted from this requirement if you are a victim or potential victim of domestic abuse. Please let your worker know immediately if that is the case.

In general, states must help find absent parents, prove paternity, help custodial parents get an order for medical and financial support, help update orders that are no longer reasonable, and enforce any order that is in effect.

Child Support Enforcement varies by state, and there are new rules to resolve which state has enforcement responsibility when parents live in two different states. States are required to cooperate with each other in enforcing out-of-state orders.

Can I get Help through Child Support Enforcement?

Since 1975, the Federal government has given states funds to run a child support program. States must provide services for any custodial parent in the state who needs help collecting child support. Missouri's program is run through the Department of Social Services, Division of Child Support Enforcement.

Families who get cash assistance through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and other public programs automatically qualify to get help from Child Support Enforcement collecting child support. In fact, Missouri parents getting TANF or Medicaid are required to cooperate with Child Support Enforcement.

Parents who do not receive TANF may also apply for Child Support Enforcement's services.

How Much Does Child Support Enforcement Charge?

Child support services are generally free of charge. It is important to remember that the representative the state assigns to your case and for the hearing process is paid by the state and represents their position—not either parent's position. Be sure you ask the hearing representative to fully explain your legal relationship with him or her.

Some states charge as much as \$25 to apply for services and, in some cases, also charge for administrative fees. Be sure to ask about fees before entering into any agreement.

How Do I Apply for Child Support Enforcement Services?

Missouri has a central office in Jefferson City, two regional offices and 23 field offices around the state. To get an application, contact any Child Support Enforcement office, call toll-free at 1-800-859-7999, or request an application online at: <http://www.dss.mo.gov/cse/askcse.htm>.

You can contact the State office at Department of Social Services, Division of Child Support Enforcement, P.O. Box 2320, Jefferson City, MO, 65102-2320, 573-751-4301 or 800-859-7999.

For more information, see: <http://www.dss.mo.gov/cse/>.

If I Have Trouble Making Child Support Payments, Can I Get Help?

Regular child support payments depend to a large extent on the ability of the non-custodial parent to pay. Many non-custodial parents (mostly fathers) who miss child support payments struggle to stay employed. In 1995, 55 percent of non-custodial parents had yearly earnings that were then below the poverty line for one person (\$7,470).

Division of Child Support Enforcement runs the Parents' Fair Share program for non-custodial parents who have trouble making child support payments, are looking for a job, and are having trouble making ends meet. The program's goal is to make parents "self-sufficient" and better able to meet their children's financial and emotional needs.

To be eligible, a parent must live in Missouri, be unemployed or underemployed, be 18 or older, have an order to pay support for a child living elsewhere, and have a case with the Division of Child Support Enforcement.

To find out more about Parents' Fair Share, call 1-800-859-7999, contact your local Child Support Enforcement office, or see: <http://www.dss.mo.gov/cse/pfs/index.htm>.

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