



# Child Support Handbook



Department of  
Human Services

# **Child Support Handbook for Custodial and Noncustodial Parents**

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## OUR MISSION

*To build strong families by connecting Tennesseans to employment, education, and support services.*

## Introduction

Families come in all shapes, forms, and sizes and when parents are members of different households, ensuring children are supported can be challenging and emotionally taxing for all parties involved. The [Child Support Division at the Tennessee Department of Human Services](#) (TDHS) works with the court system and a variety of partners to help Tennessee parents navigate the challenges of parenting from different households. Locating parents, establishing paternity, review and adjustment of child support orders, and enforcing child and medical support orders are all part of this division's duties.

## **About this Handbook**

Understanding your rights as a parent or guardian and Child Support program participant can help ensure your child receives the resources they need to grow and be well.

Use this handbook as a guide for the TDHS Child Support Program and related services, rights and responsibilities, State fees, cost recovery and distribution policies. Additional information is available online when you visit <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/for-families/child-support-services.html>.

*A glossary of Child Support Program Terms and Frequently Asked Questions can be found at the end of this handbook.*

## **What is Child Support and How Does it Work in Tennessee?**

Child Support aims to ensure children have their financial and health care needs met by parents and guardians who may be members of different households.

## **What parties are involved with in Child Support?**

In Tennessee, child support services and programing may involve a combination the following parties:

- Custodial parents or guardians
- Noncustodial parents or guardians
- Children under 18
- Private attorneys representing parents, guardians, or children
- The Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) Child Support Program and/or private agencies under contract with the State.
- The local District Attorney's Office
- Employers

## **Tennessee Department of Human Services and Child Support**

Not all child support cases involve the state Tennessee Department of Human Services Child Support Program. Many cases are handled by private attorneys or by the parents themselves with no governmental involvement. These cases are usually referred to as "private" or "non-IV-D." The term "IV-D" (pronounced "four dee"), as in "IV-D program" or "IV-D case" comes from the location of the original legislation that created the Child Support Program within Title IV-D of the Social Security Act.

A child support matter becomes an IV-D case when the child and a parent receive public assistance, or a parent applies for services from the Child Support Program. Either parent can request that the IV-D agency become involved in a child support case. The Tennessee Department of Human Services' (TDHS) Child Support Program is designed to work with parents, guardians, courts, employers, and other agencies.

## **Services available through TDHS Child Support Offices:**

The TDHS Child Support Program Offers the following Services:

### **Locating Parent(s) for the Purpose of Obtaining Support**

Before any action to establish paternity or enforce child support can take place, both parents must be found. Providing information to TDHS about the other parent and his or her possible whereabouts is very important to this process. Information such as the parent's address, phone number, Social Security number, and/or employer's name are very useful and may expediate the location process. In cases where this information is unknown, Tennessee will use other records and resources such as driver license records, motor vehicle registration, or wage records to locate the parent. Even if the parent is in the military.

### **Establishing Parentage of a Child**

In Tennessee, if the child's mother is married at the time of the child's birth, the husband is assumed to be the legal father of the child (responsible for supporting the child). If the child's mother is not married when the child is born, the child does not have a legal father. Paternity must be legally recognized before child support can be ordered. Unmarried parents have the option to legally establish the paternity of

their child by signing a Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity form at the hospital, local health department, or local Child Support Office. Paternity testing can also be conducted to assist with determining the biological father of the child.

### **Establishing A Child Support Order (For Medical or Financial Support)**

A petition must be filed with the court requesting for the child support be established. The non-requesting parent must be served with the petition prior to the court date. The Child Support Guidelines must be used to set the amount of support unless the judge finds that it would not be appropriate to do so in your case.

Tennessee's Child Support Guidelines are based on an Income Shares model.

**The Income Shares model presumes that both parents contribute to the financial support of the child in proportion to the gross income available to each parent.** More information about the Income Shares model for determining support amounts can be found on the Internet at:

<https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/for-families/child-support-services/child-support-guidelines.html>.

### **Enforcement of Child Support Order**

Once a child support order is obtained in Tennessee, the duty to support continues until the child has emancipated (reached age eighteen (18) or graduated high school, whichever occurs last).

When an employer or payer of income is identified, the Child Support agency will issue an income withholding order. If past due support is owed, a payment amount to reduce the balance will be included. Past due child support may also be collected in other ways even if the noncustodial parent

is making payments on the balance. For example, the noncustodial parent may be paying the current obligation plus an amount toward the arrears balance and still have his or her tax refund intercepted and applied to the outstanding balance.

Under certain conditions, overdue Child Support can be taken directly from the noncustodial parent by enforcement actions if the noncustodial parent does not pay as ordered. When this occurs, this payment is called an “involuntary payment”. Involuntary payments include, but are not limited to, tax offsets, administrative offsets, liens, and/or seized assets.

### **Other Payment Enforcement Actions**

The TDHS Child Support Program may take other actions to enforce payment of support. These actions may include the placement of liens on property, the revocation of various licenses, restricted driver license, treasury offset, bank account seizure, passport denial, and reporting to credit bureaus. The action(s) taken are based on the circumstances of the individual case and the specific rules that apply to the use of each enforcement method.

### **Working Across State Lines (Intergovernmental Cooperation)**

Local Child Support Offices work with other Child Support Offices (in other states) to provide child support services. When one parent lives in one state/territory/country and the other parent and child live in another state, the case is referred to as an intergovernmental case. All states have a child support program and are required to work together to establish and enforce child support orders. Federal laws allow Tennessee to enforce orders that have been established in other states.



## **Review and Adjustment of Child Support Orders**

The custodial and noncustodial parents both have the right to request a review for possible adjustment of the child support order at any time. The TDHS Child Support Program may initiate a review once they become aware of a change in circumstances of either party in an IV-D case. A significant variance is required for adjustment of an existing order.

If the case has had a complete review, either judicially or administratively, within two (2) years of the request, the party requesting the review is required to provide the caseworker with information to indicate there has been a change before a new review will be initiated.

The change of circumstances could include, but are not limited to:

- Either party has an additional child for whom the party is legally responsible and actually supporting who was not included on the most recent credit worksheet.
- Either party has a qualified other child who was included on the last credit worksheet who has emancipated or is deceased.
- Either party has a significant change in income. This change could be from a job loss or change in employment, an inheritance, lottery winnings, or other source.
- A child supported by the order has become disabled.
- The noncustodial parent is incarcerated (or will be incarcerated) for a period of one hundred eighty (180) days or greater.

- A significant variance for adjustment of an income shares order requires a minimum 15% difference between the amount of the proposed order and the amount of the existing order.

Both parties will be mailed an Affidavit of Income and Expenses when the review process begins. It is very important that this document be completed by both parties and returned to the child support office. Current income information for both parties will be reviewed to determine if an adjustment is appropriate based on the Tennessee Child Support Guidelines.

The review and adjustment may be conducted judicially by the court or administratively by the Department of Human Services and/or a local child support office.

If you are interested in learning more about the review and adjustment process, you may contact your local child support office.

### **Child Support Office Service Limitations:**

There are limits to the services provided by your local support office. The following services cannot be performed by the local Child Support Offices:

- Assistance in resolving custody or visitation issues.
- Handling restraining orders, protective orders, or harassment issues.
- Handling divorce proceedings.

## **Getting Legal Help**

The Child Support Program does not represent parent(s) or caretaker(s) in legal matters. Families who need legal assistance to obtain child support may seek the help of a private attorney, a legal aid clinic or the State Child Support Agency. Attorneys handling child support cases through the Child Support Program represent the State of Tennessee and the best interest of the child(ren).

## **Applying For TDHS Child Support Services**

Any custodial parent, noncustodial parent or caretaker of a child who needs the services offered by the Child Support Program may apply for services regardless of income. You may apply for child support services by:

- Completing an online application through the TDHS website,
- Downloading and printing an Application for Child Support Services from the TDHS Child Support website. Both English and Spanish versions of the application are available, or
- By calling the local child support office in your area and requesting an application be mailed to you.

## **Equal Treatment**

In accordance with federal law and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) policy, The Tennessee Department of Human Services is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. To file a complaint of discrimination, contact HHS. Write HHS, Director, Office for Civil Rights, Room 506-F, 200 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20201, or call (202) 619-0403 (Voice) or (202) 619-3257 (TTY). HHS are equal opportunity providers and employers.

**You may also write:**

Tennessee DHS Civil Rights Compliance Officer James K. Polk Building  
505 Deaderick Street 14th Floor Nashville, TN 37243

If you need help with access to our office due to a disability, please call the TDHS Civil Rights Compliance Officer at (615) 313-4748 prior to your appointment.

Rights and Responsibilities of Recipients of Child Support Services: This handbook provides information describing available services, the individual's rights and responsibilities, State's fees, cost recovery and distribution policies.

Domestic Violence: If you need help regarding domestic violence problems, call the national helpline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or a local Child Support office for assistance.

## **Child Support Payment Collection and Distribution**

Courts typically have the final authority for deciding the amount of child support to be paid and who will be responsible for making those payments. In jurisdictions that do not use an administrative process, most child support processes that initiate, establish, enforce, and modify actions are filed and processed in the Courts. The following information is a general outline of how the child support payment distribution is conducted by the TDHS Child Support Program.

## **Steps in the Child Support Payment Distribution Process and Timeline:**

### **a) Payments are Received**

Thousands of Child Support payments are received each day. These payments come from individuals, employers, and other state child support agencies. Payments also come from federal and state sources such as the IRS, Unemployment, the Social Security Administration, Unemployment Compensation, etc. Collections received through our State Disbursement Unit are recorded and processed on the day they are received.

### **b) Payments Are Matched to Their Case**

This process is simple and very quick if the proper identifying information is received with the payment. The information needed includes the case number, support order number (court docket number), Court name, name of the custodial parent, and name of the noncustodial parent.

### **c) Payments are Distributed**

In Tennessee, the preferred method for disbursing (paying) child support collections to the custodial parent is with a state issued debit card. This method increases the speed with which payments are made and provides greater security. Information about this method is available on the TDHS website at: <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/for-families/child-support-services/child-support-payment-information.html>.

Parents can also elect to have payment delivered via direct deposit to a bank or prepaid account.

## **When a Payment is Delayed**

Sometimes a payment can be delayed. Here are a few common causes of payment delays:

- Identifying information sent with payment is missing or incorrect.
- The custodial parent owes Tennessee money.
- You do not have an open case in Tennessee's Child Support Enforcement System (TCSSES).
- The necessary information from your support order has not been entered in TCSSES.
- TCSSES does not have a current mailing address on file for you.
- The payment is for less than one dollar (\$1.00) or greater than one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000).
- The collection was taken from an IRS tax refund that the noncustodial parent filed jointly with his/her current spouse.
- There is a hold on the case due to a court order or administrative appeal.

## Child Support Payment Requirements

### Requirements for Parents/Guardian Receiving Child Support Directly from the Noncustodial Parent

Any Child Support payments received by a noncustodial parent/guardian must be sent to the State Disbursement Unit in Nashville, Tennessee if the parent/guardian:

1. Receives Families First/TANF assistance
2. Filed an application for child support services, or
3. Has a private case where the initial child support order was issued on or after January 1, 1994, AND the child support payment is being withheld from the noncustodial parent's wages by his or her employer.

### Child Support Distribution

#### *For Non-Families First/TANF Recipients*

- The parent or guardian has not received Families First benefits in Tennessee or public assistance in another state.
- The parent or guardian does not owe any state money for previous collections received in error.

With the exception of the \$35 annual fee, parents who have never received Families First/TANF will receive all child support payments collected by the Department of Human Services. **Exclusion:** Any collections received from intercepting the noncustodial parent's federal income tax refund must be used to pay state arrears first.

### *For Current Families First/TANF (Public Assistance Cash Payments) Recipients*

For active Families First cases, child support payments are issued in Tennessee as child support “pass-through payments.” The amount of the child support pass-through payment in a given month depends on the amount of unmet need in your Families First budget. The unmet need is based upon the number of people in the Families First assistance group, the amount of the Families First payment and the amount of child support that the noncustodial parent actually pays. You can ask your Families First case manager about your unmet need.

By law, parents/guardians who are currently receiving Families First/TANF cash payments for a child(ren), have the right to receive child support in Tennessee. This means custodial parents must cooperate with TDHS Child Support Office efforts to locate an absent parent, establish paternity, obtain health insurance and/or cash medical support and establish and enforce a child support obligation(s). Current Families First/TANF recipients are also required to give the state all child support payments received directly from the noncustodial parent.

### *Parent Safety for Current Families First Recipients*

If you think that you or your children would be harmed if TDHS attempts to collect Child Support from the noncustodial parent, tell your Families First/TANF case manager immediately and share your concerns for your family's safety. Notifying your case will allow TDHS to review your case for “Good Cause.”



## Child Support and Income Tax Refunds:

Overdue child support may be taken directly from the noncustodial parent's federal income tax refund and parents are personally liable for any amounts of income tax refunds received in error. This includes amounts that must be returned to the IRS due to the filing of a revised tax return within six (6) years.

### *Income Tax Refunds and Families First/TANF*

If a family receives or has ever received Families First or public assistance benefits, by federal law, money collected for child support must be used to repay those benefits to the state and federal government. Generally, child support collections are used first to pay any child support owed to the family, and then to repay the debt to the government. However, **child support payments that are intercepted (collected) from the noncustodial parent's federal income tax refund is treated differently.** according to [federal distribution rules](#), this money must first be used to pay what is owed to the government. Any money that is left over after the debt is paid off will be sent to the custodial parent.

Tennessee distributes all federal income tax offsets as soon as they are received except for when the tax offset comes from a joint income tax return filed by the noncustodial parent and that parent's current spouse. In that instance, Tennessee is required to hold the money for a period of time. In cases not receiving Families First assistance, this can be up to six (6) months from the date of receipt, or until the state is notified that the IRS has paid the unobligated spouse's proper share of the refund. An unobligated spouse is someone who does not owe child support but is married to someone who does.

### *Income Tax Returns and Child Support Appeals*

A federal income tax offset (collection) will not be distributed (paid out) if the child support case is in the process of an administrative review (an appeal).

## **Filing a Child Support Case Appeal**

If a party involved in a child support case does not agree with an administrative action taken by the Child Support Program related to their case, they may appeal that action and request a hearing.

**You may file an appeal online, by phone, or by writing the Tennessee Department of Human Services as follows:**

- **Online:** Visit <https://onedhs.tn.gov/csp>.
- **By Phone:** Call 1-833-772-TDHS (8347)
- **In writing:**  
Traditional Mail:  
Tennessee Department of Human Services  
James K. Polk Building  
505 Deaderick Street, 1st Floor ATTN: Clerk's Office  
P.O. Box 198996 Nashville, TN 37219-8996

**Fax:** (866) 355-6136

**Email:** AppealsClerksOffice.DHS@tn.gov

You can also call the local Child Support Office or Division of Appeals and Hearings to request the appeal form.

## **Closing A Child Support Case**

In Tennessee, child support cases may be closed if:

- There is no longer a current child support order and total arrears are under \$500 or are unenforceable under State law
- The parent owing support died and a levy on the estate cannot be enforced.
- Parentage cannot be established.
- The parent's residence, employment address, earnings, and assets are all unknown after the local Child Support Agency made diligent efforts to locate them.
- The other parent has no earnings or assets that can be levied or attached for child support purposes.
- The parent owing support lives in a foreign country and Tennessee does not have reciprocity with that country.
- A "good cause" determination has been made (meaning, TDHS believes you have a good reason not to cooperate with locating the noncustodial parent, or pursuing child support)
- The court determines it inappropriate to establish a case for retroactive child support only.
- The recipient of services moved to another state and has applied for services there.
- The case was opened in error.

## **Filing a Complaint**

The State's Child Support Program has a formal complaint process to better serve persons who receive child support services (45 C.F.R. 303.35). Parents who have an IV-D child support case and feel they were not provided with the level or quality of service they are entitled to receive may file a written complaint under the rules and regulations of the Tennessee Department of Human Services or the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement.

Often concerns and/or complaints can usually be quickly resolved by bringing the problem to the attention of your local Child Support Office caseworker or a supervisor. If the concern and/or complaint is not resolved, a Client Complaint Form can be completed and submitted to the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS).

The form is available on the TDHS website at <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/families/child-support-services/child-support-client-comments.html> and can be submitted online.

If you prefer to mail the form, please send it to:

Child Support Program  
Tennessee Department of Human Services  
505 Deaderick St, 16th Floor  
Nashville, TN 37243

You may also submit your complaint form by email to:

[ChildSupport.CustomerService.DHS@tn.gov](mailto:ChildSupport.CustomerService.DHS@tn.gov)

Once your complaint has been received by TDHS, your concerns will be reviewed, and program staff will respond to you in writing or by phone.

It is important to note, that the Client Complaint Process does not replace any administrative hearing or appeal rights for which you may be entitled.

## Frequently Asked Questions (Custodial Parents)

### **Families First recipients-What is meant by having “Good Cause” for not cooperating with Child Support?**

If you think that helping the Child Support Office establish paternity or establish and enforce an order for child support and/or medical support may cause harm to you or your child(ren), you may have “good cause” for not helping us with these activities. Tell your Families First caseworker why you think you or your child(ren) will be harmed by your cooperation. If you can prove you have “good cause”, you may not be required to assist in obtaining child or medical support for your child(ren). However, if you fail to assist the Child Support Office without having “good cause”, you could lose your eligibility to receive Families First and/or TennCare/Medicaid benefits.

### **What if I am a victim of domestic violence and wish to pursue child support?**

Child support programs, both state and federal, are required to have procedures to ensure that individuals in violent or potentially violent environments may safely receive child support services while not limiting their rights to public assistance. These procedures include not disclosing identifying information which a party alleges under oath may jeopardize the health, safety, or liberty of a party or child. The personal identifying information must be sealed and not disclosed to the other party or the public. This information can only be released by a court.

### **What does the local office need to know to establish parentage?**

The local Child Support Office needs as much information about the potential father as is known, including facts about the mother's relationship with the individual, her pregnancy, and the birth of the child. It is important for local office staff to know if the potential father ever provided money for the child, admitted that he was the child's father through letters or gifts, or signed a Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity form. Information from others who know about the relationship between the mother and the potential father is helpful, as are any pictures of the potential father with the child.

**What if the person denies parentage or says he is not sure he is the father?**

Paternity tests of the mother, the child, and the potential father will either exclude the individual as the father or show that the individual is likely the father. Depending on the results of paternity tests and other evidence presented to the Court, an order establishing paternity can be entered. Many times, potential fathers will sign an agreed order for paternity based on the paternity test results.

**If my divorce orders spousal support, can I get it enforced through the Child Support Office?**

If spousal support is ordered along with child support that is being enforced by the Child Support Agency, the spousal support may also be enforced by the Child Support Agency.

**The local Tennessee Child Support office sent a request to another state to get a support order against the noncustodial parent. Why is it taking so long?**

A state will be able to respond more quickly if it receives accurate and up-to-date information on a case. Your local office will usually write or call the other state at regular



intervals to inquire about the case status and will notify you when action has been taken on your case. Most Child Support Agencies have a high demand for their services, which can affect response time. Intergovernmental cases may take more time for several reasons, including finding the noncustodial parent, waiting for court dates and/or serving the parent with legal documents.

**The noncustodial parent was laid off from his or her job and receives unemployment compensation benefits. Can I still get child support?**

A portion of the parent's unemployment compensation benefits can be withheld for child support payments.

### **Are there reasons where child support may not be collected?**

Child Support may not be collected if the noncustodial parent:

- is institutionalized in a psychiatric facility,
- is incarcerated,
- has a medically verified total permanent disability, or
- is receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- has evidence of support potential, for the duration of the child's minority. It must be determined that no income or assets are available to the noncustodial parent.

### **Why should I have my case reviewed?**

You can have your case reviewed at any time. If there has been a change in your circumstances (such as loss of job or you are now responsible for another child in your home), your order may qualify for adjustment which would result in an increase or decrease in the child support obligation.

### **How can I contact my local Child Support Office?**

You can locate all TDHS Child Support Offices at:

<https://www.tn.gov/content/tn/humanservices/for-families/child-support-services/child-support-office-locator.html>.

## **Frequently Asked Questions (Noncustodial Parents)**

### **What if I'm not the father?**

If you are not married to the mother, paternity tests of the mother, the child, and you (the potential father) can be completed to exclude you as the father. If you are married to the mother and the child is born in the marriage or less than 300 days after the marriage ends, you are presumed (by law) to be the father. You must present court papers (usually divorce papers) that say you are not the father, based on the paternity testing, in order for child support not to be pursued.

### **What if I am the father?**

The child support office can schedule paternity testing to determine whether or not you are the father. After positive paternity testing results are returned to the local child support office from the certified Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) lab, paternity and a child support order will be established through court order.

**Why should I have my case reviewed?**

You can have your case reviewed at any time. If there has been a change in your circumstances (such as loss of job or you are now responsible for another child in your home), your order may qualify for adjustment which would result in a decrease or increase in the child support obligation.

### **I want to pay child support but there's no case number yet; what do I do?**

You can apply to open a child support case to begin the process of establishing an order and start making child support payments. If you already have an order established, the local child support office can also assist you once the application has been processed. Click here to apply online, or find a list of local child support offices:

<https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/for-families/child-support-services/child-support-applying-for-services.html>

### **Are there reasons where child support may not be collected from me?**

Child Support may not be collected if you are:

- institutionalized in a psychiatric facility,
- incarcerated,
- medically verified with a total permanent disability, or
- receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- not able to provide evidence of support potential, for the duration of the child's minority. It must be determined that you have no income or assets available to you.

# **Resources for Custodial and Noncustodial Parents**

## **Employment**

### **TCSEPP & TPOPS**

600 Henley St. Suite 224  
Knoxville, TN 37996  
(865) 946-2020

Tennessee Child Support Employment and Parenting Program (TCSEPP) and the Tennessee Partnership for Ongoing Parental Support (TPOPS) help noncustodial parents find ways to meet their financial obligations and reconnect with their children. Both programs run by UT Knoxville are funded through contracts with the Tennessee Department of Human Services, Family Assistance & Child Support Division, and serve various counties throughout Tennessee.

### **IMPACT**

Non-Custodial IMPACT Program

Serving 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Judicial Districts (Carter, Johnson, Unicoi, Washington, Sullivan,

Greene, Hawkins, and Hamblen counties). For more information, contact your local Child Support office.

The IMPACT program utilizes a Two-Generation Approach (2Gen) to reach families across eight counties in Tennessee. The grant works closely with the First, Second, and Third Judicial Districts to assist noncustodial parents in achieving training and employment success while providing a nurturing environment for the parent/child bond to be developed and to thrive. It is our intent and focus to help place families in Tennessee on a better path towards economic security.

### **Court Assistance Programs**

Nashville Area:

Juvenile Court Parental Assistance Court (PAC) 100 Woodland St.

Nashville, TN 37213

(615) 862-8000

The Davidson County Juvenile Court's Parental Assistance Court (PAC) will assist parents to overcome barriers that prevent them from paying their support. PAC



offers services such as court process education, job search assistance, coaching/mentoring, GED enrollment, mental health/substance abuse referrals, financial management, housing referrals, criminal record expungement, driver's license reinstatement, mediation referrals, and conflict resolution between parties.

## **Food Assistance**

### **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

Family Assistance Service Center

(866) 311-4287 (Toll free)

Apply online: <https://onedhs.tn.gov/csp>

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) provides nutritional assistance benefits to children and families, the elderly, the disabled, unemployed, and working families. SNAP helps supplement monthly food budgets of families with low- income to buy the food they need to maintain good health and allow them to direct more of their available income toward essential living expenses. DHS staff determines the eligibility of applicants based on guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

### **Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program**

To apply, contact your local county health department  
Office numbers can be located here: <https://www.tn.gov/content/tn/health/health-program-areas/fhw/wic/redirect-wic/wic-clinics.html>

### **Cash Assistance**

### **Families First**

Family Assistance Service Center  
(866) 311-4287 (Toll free)  
Apply online: <https://onedhs.tn.gov/csp>

Families First, the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, is a workforce development and employment program. The Families First program emphasizes work, training, and personal responsibility. It is temporary and has a primary focus on gaining self-sufficiency through employment. This program helps participants reach this goal by providing temporary cash assistance, transportation, child care assistance, educational supports, job training, employment activities, and other support services.

## **Child Care**

### **Smart Steps Child Care Payment Assistance**

Apply online: <https://onedhs.tn.gov/csp>

Child Care Payment Assistance:

(833) 740-1440

Provides child care assistance for families that:

- Are employed no less than 30 hours per week, or enrolled and attending a post-secondary education program full-time,
- or
- a combination of both a child between ages six (6) weeks old through five (5) years old

## **Child Care Services**

Online tool to help parents and caregivers locate quality licensed child care facilities in your community.

For more information: <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/for-families/child-care-services.html>

## **Health Care**

TennCare

Provides health insurance to qualifying applicants.

Apply online: <https://tenncareconnect.tn.gov/>

Toll Free 1-800-838-6911

# Glossary of Child Support Program Terms

## **Alleged father**

The person named by the custodial parent as the biological father of the child before fatherhood is legally established. Also referred to as potential father.

## **Arrearage**

Unpaid, past due child support payments.

## **Caretaker**

The person with whom the child lives; may be a parent, another relative, or an unrelated individual.

## **Contempt**

Disobeying a court order when the person has the ability to comply.

## **Good Cause**

A refusal, based on circumstances that are reasonably expected to cause harm to the child or parent, to comply with the requirement to cooperate with child support activities as a condition of Families First eligibility.

## **Income Withholding Order (IWO)**

A deduction of child support payments from wages, salaries, or other income to comply with the order for support. Also, called wage withholding order.

## **IV-D**

Title IV-D of the Social Security Act, which requires all states to have a child support program. The child support program is sometimes referred to as the IV-D program.



## **Jurisdiction**

The legal authority a court has over particular persons and certain types of cases within a defined geographical area.

## **Legal Father**

A man who is seen by the law as the male parent.

## **License Revocation**

The suspension of the noncustodial parent's licenses or permits including driver's, professional, business, or recreational license or gun permit, for failure to pay child support.

## **Lien**

A claim upon property to obtain money to pay a debt from the sale or transfer of the property.

## **Modification**

- a) A court or administrative order that changes the terms of an earlier court or administrative order.
- b) Reasonable actions that have been made to accommodate customers with disabilities.

## **Noncustodial Parent**

The parent who does not have primary care, custody, or control of the child, and who may have an obligation to pay child support. Also referred to as the obligor.

## **Non-IV-D**

A child support order handled by a private attorney or parties representing themselves.

## **Obligation**

The amount of money to be paid as support by the obligor.

**Obligee**

The person to whom the child support is owed.

**Obligor**

The person who is ordered to pay the child support.

**Offset**

An amount of money taken from the obligor parent's tax refund, other federal benefit payment, or unemployment compensation to satisfy a child support debt.

**Pass-Through Payments**

A Child support payment for a family receiving cash benefits through Families First based on the Child Support collected and the unmet need in the Families First budget for that month.

## **Paternity Testing**

Analysis of factors the child has inherited from his/her mother and father. Paternity testing is used to help prove or disprove whether a particular man fathered the child. Also referred to as Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) testing and genetic testing.

## **Petition**

A formal written request made to a court.

## **Petitioner**

The person for whom the petition is filed.

## **TANF**

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. The federal program that provides cash assistance to families in need. Tennessee calls its TANF program "Families First".

## **Visitation**

The right of the noncustodial parent to visit or spend time with his or her children. This may also be referred to as “parenting time.”

## **Voluntary Acknowledgement of Paternity**

A document signed by an unmarried mother and father stating that the man signing is the biological father of the child. This legally establishes the man as the child’s father and allows his name to be placed on the child’s birth certificate. It also is used to establish a legal duty of support between the man and the child.



## **Child Support Program**

**Apply for services and find office and program information when you visit:**

[TN.Gov/HumanServices/For-Families/Child-Support-Services.html](https://www.tn.gov/human-services/for-families/child-support-services.html)

### **Phone:**

Child Support Disbursement Unit: 1-833-772-TDHS (8347)

Paternity Acknowledgement Program Hotline: 1-833-772-TDHS (8347)

Tennessee Child Support Employer Line: 1-833-772-TDHS (8347)

*The Child Support Program at the Tennessee Department of Human Services provides services that promote parental responsibility to meet the financial needs of children and their families including location of child's parent(s), establishment of paternity, establishment and enforcement of child support orders, establishment and enforcement of medical support, collection and distribution of child support payments, modification of child support orders, enforcement of spousal support orders.*