

Benefits of Paternity Establishment

The greatest statistical indicator of whether or not an unmarried dad will be involved in his child's life is whether or not he establishes paternity.

Give your child the advantage of having a father right from the start!

Paternity helps children

- ◆ Have a relationship with both parents
- ◆ Gain the security of knowing that their father cares
- ◆ Have knowledge of both families' medical histories
- ◆ Achieve better outcomes
- ◆ Decrease the likelihood of high-risk behavior
- ◆ Have access to health insurance and/or benefits such as Social Security or inheritance

Paternity helps mothers

- ◆ Share the responsibility and rewards of parenthood
- ◆ Share the cost of raising the child

Paternity helps fathers

- ◆ Gain legal rights to their child by having his name on the birth certificate
- ◆ Show that they are committed to their child
- ◆ Establish an emotional bond with the child and participate in the child's life



*“What a difference
a Dad makes!”*

For more information about
paternity acknowledgment, contact:



South Carolina Parenting Opportunity Program

What a Difference a Dad makes!

Toll free: (866) 914-8786

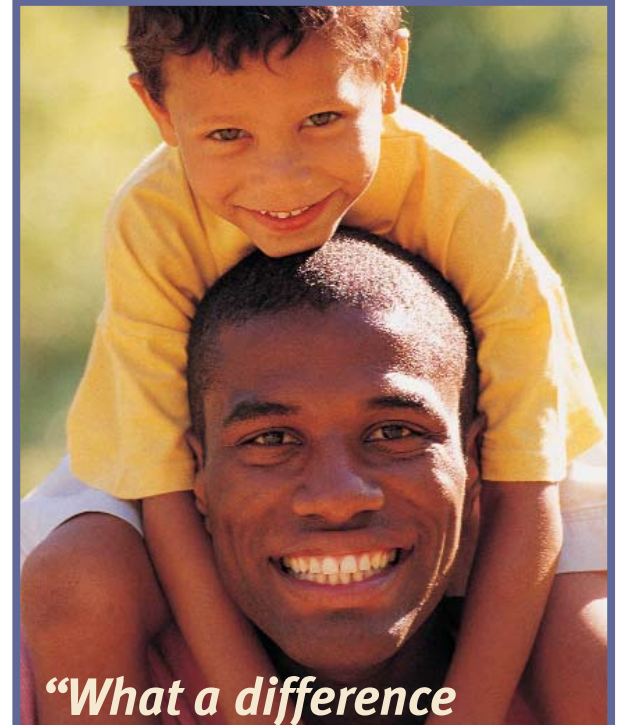
For more information about
birth certificates, contact:

**The South Carolina
Division of Vital Records**

Phone: (803) 898-3630

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*“What a difference
a Dad makes!”*

Important Information for Unmarried Parents

*Should you
establish paternity?*



**South Carolina
Parenting Opportunity
Program**

What a difference a Dad makes!

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What is paternity establishment?

Paternity means legal fatherhood. Establishing paternity is the process where an unmarried biological father becomes the legal father of his child. Unmarried parents can establish a man as the legal father and add the father's name to their child's birth certificate while at the hospital by completing a Paternity Acknowledgment Affidavit. **It is not a DNA test.**



How does establishing paternity help my child?

- ◆ **Self Esteem.** Children respond better to love and support from both parents. They gain a sense of belonging and benefit from knowing that both of their parents care for them. It is important that they know who their father is and that he cares about them.
- ◆ **Family Identity.** When children know they are part of a family, they are likely to be more secure about who they are. Establishing paternity identifies the father's side of the family and encourages relationships with his family.
- ◆ **Shared Parenting.** Parenting is the responsibility of both the father and the mother. Early paternity establishment may lead to increased involvement of the father (studies show that this results in a decrease in high risk behavior by the child). Finally, more resources are available when both parents share the responsibility of raising their child.
- ◆ **Health History.** Establishing paternity helps establish the child's health history. It is important for children and their physicians to know the family's medical history.

Is paternity establishment easy?

Yes! The process is easy and available to parents if the mother was not married at any time during her pregnancy. In order for you to establish paternity at the hospital, the baby must be born in South Carolina and the man must be the child's biological father. Parents simply complete a Paternity Acknowledgment Affidavit with the birth clerk. This is a quick summary of the steps to complete the form:

- ◆ The hospital will review the affidavit with you and answer any questions you have.
- ◆ Both parents must have a valid government-issued photo identification card and Social Security number (if you have one).
- ◆ Both the mother and the father sign the same form in front of hospital staff.
- ◆ The hospital staff will witness that neither parent is being forced to sign the form.
- ◆ Hospital staff will notarize it and send it to the Office of Vital Records with the birth certificate record.

Parents can also fill out a Paternity Acknowledgment Affidavit later at the State Office of Vital Records or their local Vital Records office. **There is a \$27 fee to complete the form at Vital Records (a \$12 birth certificate search fee and a \$15 amendment fee).**



What if I change my mind later?

Parents should think carefully before establishing paternity. If you do change your mind, you have 60 days to rescind (cancel) the paternity acknowledgment. However, a court order is required to remove the man's name from the birth certificate.

Misconceptions About Establishing Paternity

Many guys think that if they establish paternity at the hospital then they will have to pay court-ordered child support. **THIS IS NOT TRUE.** The only way a dad is required to pay court-ordered child support is if the child's mother opens a child support case.

Some women think that establishing paternity is going to affect how much government assistance they can receive. **THIS ALSO IS NOT TRUE.**



What rights will the father have?

Men, did you know that you have **NO RIGHTS** to your child if you do not establish legal fatherhood?

- ◆ Your name will not be on the birth certificate.
- ◆ You will have no visitation or custody rights.
- ◆ You will have no legal say in decisions such as education, medical treatment, religion, etc.

Signing the Paternity Acknowledgment Affidavit does not automatically give the father visitation or custody rights—but it does give you the opportunity to ask the court for those rights.

What if I'm not sure I'm the father?

DNA testing can help you determine whether a man is a child's biological father. Call the SCPOP office toll free at (866) 914-8786 to receive information on a low-cost DNA test through the Department of Social Services. **If you are not sure who the father is, you should not complete the form.**