

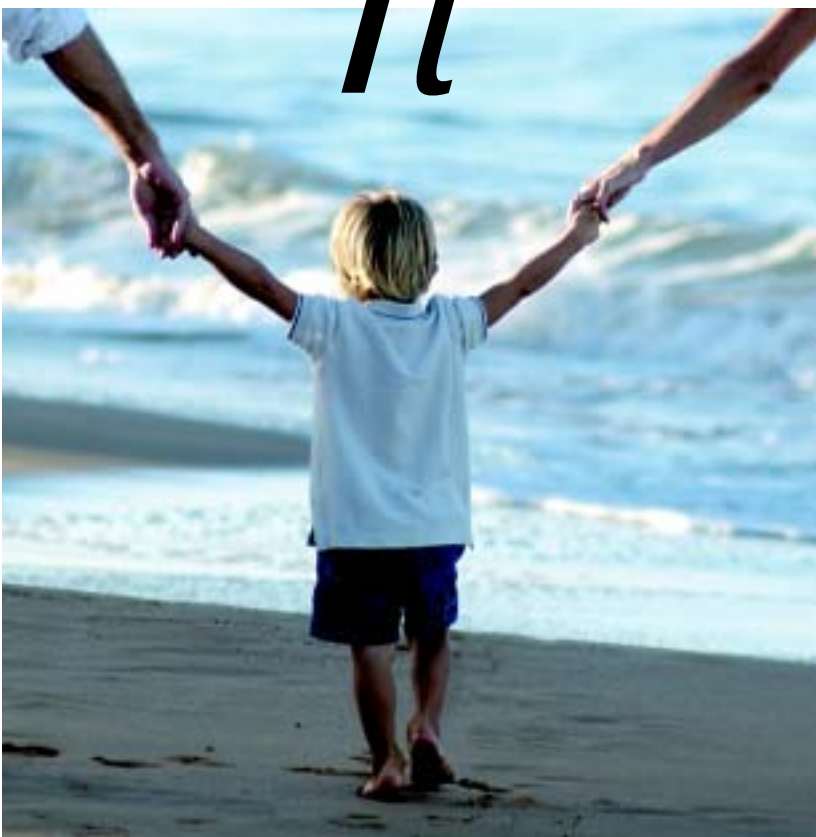


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P O S I T I V E  
P A R E N T H O O D

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*It*



*Takes*  
*TWO*

# Put Children First



The New Hampshire Division of Child Support Services thanks the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Revenue in the development of this brochure.

## **A Child Has Two Parents**

For their child's sake, both parents need to figure out how to bring up their child together—even if they are apart. That means being responsible, cooperating with each other and supporting the relationship their child has with each other. This brochure describes steps you can take to make this happen.\*

These recommendations are for parents who are parenting a child together and one of the parents doesn't live with the child. Many of these recommendations also apply to parents who live together.

### ***As a Responsible Parent...***

- **Respect the child's other parent**
- **Spend time with your child**
- **Discipline with love**
- **Be a role model for your child**
- **Provide emotional and financial support for your child**

\* These are general guidelines, so not everything may fit your situation. This is especially true if there is a history of unsafe behavior during visits, high conflict between the parents or domestic violence. In these cases, the court may need to make recommendations about how to set up the visits to keep everyone safe.

## Managing Your Relationship

### *Parents Are Partners*

Parents have all kinds of relationships. Some live together. Some spend time together, but live separately. Others get together, break up, get together again . . . And many

split up forever, often starting new relationships. But no matter what, all parents are connected permanently through their child.

In many of these situations, one or both parents still have feelings about the other parent. Maybe you'd like to get back together. Maybe you are just curious about who they are with now.

Whatever your feelings, focus your attention on your child and leave your relationship with the other parent out of it. What happened between the two of you is not as important as your child having two involved parents.

### *Communication Is the Key*

Throughout your child's life, there are going to be many occasions when you will have to exchange information with the other parent, make a decision together or attend the same event. The two of you need to find a way to communicate without fighting. For many people, it's helpful to set rules about where, when and what you talk about.

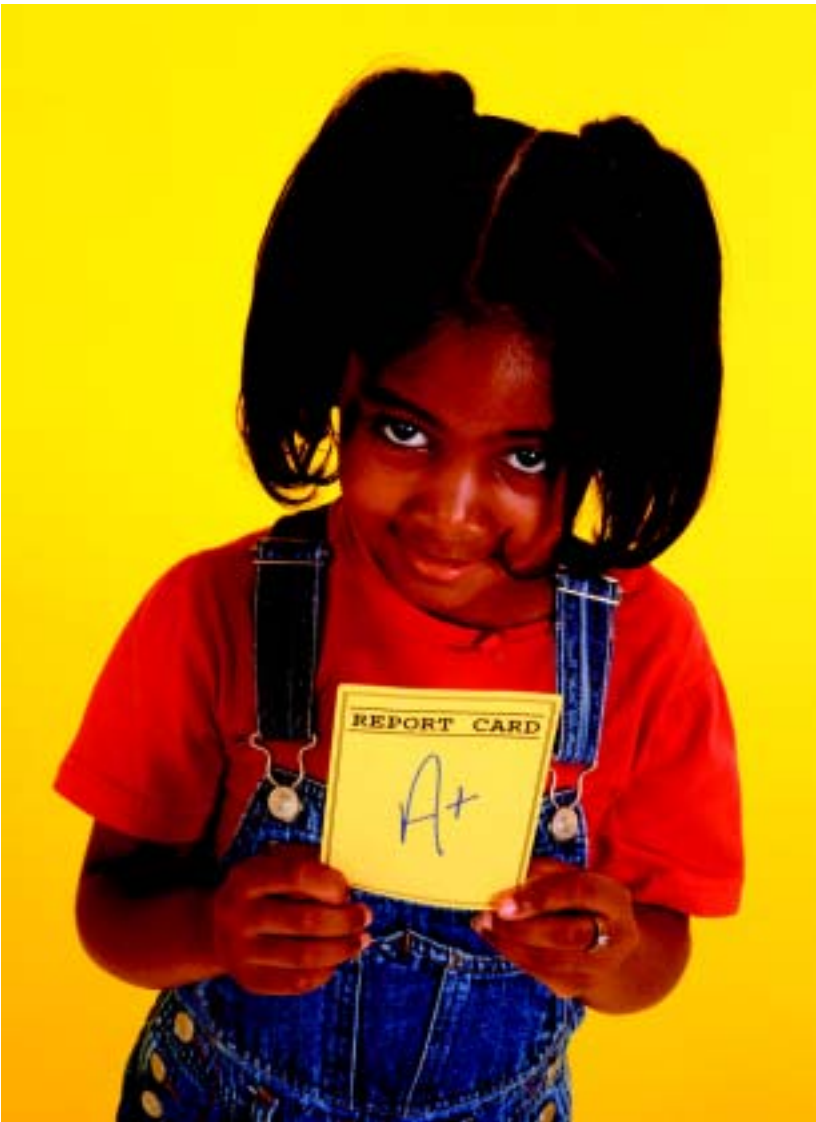
### *Resolving Conflict*

In good communication, it's okay to disagree. In fact, if you can show your children how to resolve conflict calmly, you are teaching them a valuable lesson. On the other hand, seeing grown-ups fight is scary for children.

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If you cannot disagree without losing control, you need to make special arrangements to communicate with your child's other parent calmly and safely. See the Other Tips for Successful Visitation section for suggestions.

### ***Other Tips for Managing Your Relationship***

*Treat Each Other With Respect.* Never badmouth the other parent. Remember that you're talking about someone your child cares about!

*Grown-up Talk Is for Grown-ups.* Don't discuss problems related to child support, parenting, visitation or your relationship in front of your child.

## **Successful Parenting Time**

### ***Be There***

Imagine how children feel if one parent sees them only every now and then, or worse yet, doesn't see them at all. Abandoned? Unloved? Worthless?

Children whose parents have regular, positive contact with them are less likely to be poor, drop out of school, use drugs or become teen parents.

If you want your children to have the best chance in life, you have to show them that they're important to you by calling and seeing them regularly.

## **Share Your Child**

Parents need to support each other in spending time with their child. If you make it hard for one parent or don't let them visit at all, the person you hurt most is your child! This is because:

- It will be harder for you and your child's other parent to cooperate in the future.
- Your child's other parent may become discouraged and stop spending time with your child.
- Your child may doubt that the other parent loves them, or believe that the conflict is their fault.

Please note that special arrangements may need to be made if there are concerns about violence, high conflict or unsafe behavior around the child.

## **Parenting Plans**

One of the best ways to make sure that your child has the responsible involvement of both parents is to create a parenting plan. This is a written agreement between the two of you that says how often, how long and when the other parent will spend time with the child.

The plan can also address topics such as your child's education, healthcare and religion, and describe a way to make child-rearing decisions together. Your plan should be consistent, but allow for changes once in a while if there are emergencies or special circumstances.

In many cases, parents are able to work out parenting plans themselves, or with the help of family, friends and community organizations. However, in situations where the parents cannot agree, either parent may ask the court to issue a visitation order. (For more on visitation orders, see the *Legal Aspects of Unmarried Parenthood* section.)



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## ***Other Tips for Successful Visitation***

***Keep Calendars.*** Both parents need to inform each other of their plans ahead of time, especially when they affect visiting schedules.

***Have Regular Meetings or Phone Calls.*** Plan a way to exchange information and make decisions together. Prepare lists of things to talk about beforehand.

***Have a Way to Deal With Disagreement.*** Don't let disagreements grow into fights. Agree ahead of time on how you will resolve conflict, whether by sending letters, making a special appointment or having a neutral third person present at your discussion.

## **Legal Aspects of Unmarried Parenthood**

### ***Separate the Issues***

There are three major legal issues related to unmarried parenthood: paternity establishment, child support and visitation. Children have a right to all three. Even though it may seem unfair, you can have one without the other.

For example, a parent needs to pay child support even if the other parent won't let them spend time with the child. Or a parent should let the other parent spend time with the child, even if they don't pay child support.

### ***Paternity Establishment***

The only way a child can have a legal father, if the parents are unmarried, is if paternity is established. Most often this is done by both parents signing a form in the hospital or in the city or town clerk's office where the child was born. Either parent can also request that the court order genetic testing and name the legal father.

Establishing paternity gives your child important rights he or she would not otherwise have. These include:

- Financial support to help meet your child's needs
- Access to the father's medical history in the case of illness or disease
- Access to the father's benefits such as Social Security, pensions, health insurance, inheritance

### ***Child Support***

Child support is a way for parents who don't live together to share the financial responsibility for their child. The parent living with the child spends a lot of their income to meet the child's needs. So the other parent pays to help provide the child's food, clothing, housing, transportation, school supplies, etc.

Usually child support is arranged through a court order. Either parent can ask for an order—directly from the court, or with the help of the State child support agency.

The court decides the amount of the order based on both parents' incomes. Most often, the child support is deducted from one parent's wages and sent to the other parent. Occasionally, the court allows one parent to pay child support directly to the other parent.

Some parents pay child support directly to the other parent without a court order. While this may seem easier when both parents are cooperating, it doesn't provide security for either one if there are disagreements.

If you are paying child support directly to your child's other parent—with or without a court order—keep written records of all your

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payments to avoid disputes. Money order receipts and cancelled checks are good payment records. It is best not to make child support payments in cash.

### ***Visitation Order***

Visitation establishes a way for a parent who doesn't live with a child to spend regular time with the child. It is different from legal or physical custody. Legal custody is the right to make decisions about the child's daily activities, healthcare, religion and education. Physical custody is who the child lives with most of the time.

Parents who agree on a visitation or parenting plan can have the court enter their agreements as orders. If parents can't agree, the court can make its own orders. The goal of the court is to make an arrangement that is in the child's best interest. This may be different from what one or both parents want.

### ***What the Court Considers in Creating Visitation Orders***

- Age and developmental stage of the child
- The individual needs of the child
- History of the relationship between the parents
- How close parents live to each other
- Parents' work schedules
- Parents' problems such as substance abuse, domestic violence, child abuse or a criminal record



*You are one of the most important influences in your child's life. Seeing you*

*work to fulfill your goals is one of the most positive examples you can set for your child. So, if you haven't already, get your GED, go back to school, get a job.*

*Show your child how to succeed!*



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