



Part 10

Child Support, Custody & Visitation

If you're a parent, you have the right and responsibility to have a relationship with your child. Once paternity is established, either parent can request the court to decide the following:

- **Child support.** A child support order makes the non-custodial parent responsible for medical insurance, health care, and child care expenses. Up to three years of back support may be collected. Child support is based on the parent's ability to work and personal property. Wages from employers and/or the military may be legally *garnisheed* (to take wages by legal authority to pay debts). Payments may be adjusted as the parent gets older and earns more money. Even if the non-custodial parent is unemployed, he or she may still be required to pay child support.
- **Custody.** Custody determines where the child lives and who makes decisions about the child's care. A parent may be awarded sole or shared custody. *Sole custody* means the child lives with one parent while *shared custody* means the child lives with each parent part of the time. Both parents share equally in decisions about the child's care. A court looks at a variety of factors, including parent-child relationships and each parent's ability to provide for the child. Courts do consider evidence of domestic violence. Parents have custody rights before anyone else, including the child's grandparents. Regardless of parental age, the law assumes parents get custody before any other person.
- **Visitation.** Often the court will determine visitation rights as part of the child support case. These visitations or parenting times allow the non-custodial parent to visit with the child according to a prearranged schedule. The court may deny visitation if there is a possibility the parent may harm the child. Grandparents may also ask the court for visitation rights.

Directions: Read each of the following situations. Answer the questions in the space provided and give reasons to support your responses. If necessary, use an additional sheet of paper and attach it to this activity. You may use reliable Internet, print, mentor, or instructor resources as you determine your responses to the questions.

1. Imagine you're a non-custodial parent. What can you do to develop a close relationship with your child?

2. Imagine you're a custodial parent. How can you encourage the non-custodial parent to become more involved?

3. Imagine you don't want the involvement of the non-custodial parent. What impact will that have on your child?

Quick Tip

Know the Social Security number of the child's other parent in order to trace his or her current place of employment and residence.

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4. Eric just became a father and is not married to the mother. He doesn't have a job. Does he have to pay child support? Why or why not?

5. Tami, age 17, and Justin, age 19, have a 3-month-old son. They fight constantly and are in the process of breaking up. Justin says he should have custody of their son. Who will get custody?

6. Michella, age 16, just gave birth. Her boyfriend's parents want to raise the baby, saying Michella's too young to raise a child. What rights does Michella have in this situation? What rights do her boyfriend's parents have in this situation?

7. When Cole tells LaVonne he wants to be an active father in their baby's life, LaVonne says: "I don't care if you want to help with the baby. I never want to see you again." What can Cole do?

8. Lamar has visitation rights with his one-year-old daughter, Dasha, every other weekend. He lives with his dad. Dasha's mother knows that Lamar's dad is an alcoholic and has an explosive temper. She fears for Dasha's safety. What can Dasha's mother do?
