



### Points to Remember

- Do not ignore the Summons and Complaint. It does not go away and can change the rest of your life.
- You only have 30 days to respond to the Summons and Complaint from the date you are served.
- If you have any questions about the Summons and Complaint, please contact the local child support agency or the Family Law Facilitator listed in the paperwork.

**We are here to help!**

*The California Department of Child Support Services does not provide legal services to parents or guardians.*



*Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor  
State of California*

*Kimberly Belshé, Secretary  
California Health and Human Services Agency*

*David Maxwell-Jolly, Director  
Department of Child Support Services*

1-866-249-0773 (toll-free)  
TTY 1-866-223-9529 (toll-free)  
[www.childsup.ca.gov](http://www.childsup.ca.gov)

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Supporting California's Children

# Establishing a Child Support Order



Department of  
Child Support Services

When the local child support agency opens a case, the first step it takes to establish a child support order is to prepare a Summons and Complaint. A proposed judgment is also prepared to show you the amount of child support you are being asked to pay.



### What is a Summons and Complaint?

A Summons and Complaint is a legal document used to establish paternity (child's father), child support and medical support.

### What is a Proposed Judgment?

A proposed judgment is what the local child support agency is asking the court to order.

### How will I be notified if a Summons and Complaint is filed against me?

You will be served (given) the Summons and Complaint personally, or sometimes someone you know will be served on your behalf. Before serving you the papers, the local child support agency may send you a courtesy letter that informs you of the complaint. The letter tells you that you can pick up the complaint at the child support office rather than being served at your home or workplace.

### What should I do after I am served?

You have 30 days from the date you were served to respond. There are several ways to respond:

**File an answer.** If you disagree with any part of the proposed judgment you must file an Answer to Complaint with the court within 30 days. The forms are included with the complaint. The Family Law Facilitator at the courthouse can help you prepare an Answer to Complaint. The Family Law Facilitator provides free legal assistance and is not part of the local child support agency.

**Sign a Stipulation.** You may contact the child support office named in the Summons and Complaint to sign an agreement (Stipulation) to establish paternity, child support and medical support.

**Get genetic testing.** If you don't think you are the father of the child named in the complaint, contact your local child support agency so you can arrange for testing to determine whether you are the father.

**Hire an attorney.** A Summons and Complaint is a legal document. You are being sued. You may want to hire a private attorney to represent you.

**Get legal help.** You may ask the Family Law Facilitator for free help in reviewing and completing forms.

## Do not ignore the Summons and Complaint!

### What happens if I do not respond?

If you ignore these legal papers you will be considered the legal parent and you may be ordered to pay child support and/or medical support.

If you do not sign an agreement (Stipulation) or file an Answer to Complaint within **30 days**, the proposed judgment will become a **final judgment**, which means a decision is made without your input. This means the amount of support you have to pay may be incorrect.

It is in your best interest to take care of this lawsuit before it becomes a final judgment. The information you provide will help ensure the child support order is correct.

If you are not sure you are the child's father, you must request genetic testing!

If you don't request testing you will become the legal father of the child even if you are not the real father. The local child support agency can help you arrange testing.

*Children need both parents to do better socially and in school.*

