

# Child Support Law in Washington State: How to Ensure the Best for Your Child

Navigating life as a single parent following a divorce can be extremely stressful and confusing, and finances may be tight as you adjust to taking care of your child on your own. Fortunately, Washington State law helps ensure children of divorce are properly cared for by requiring noncustodial parents (the parent who does not have primary custody) to pay child support. Unfortunately, some noncustodial parents see child support and spousal maintenance payments as unfair, and they may try to avoid making payments. However, a child support order in Washington is a legal obligation, and you have legal options for obtaining the financial assistance you need from your ex if they refuse to make child support payments as required. Keep reading to learn more about how child support works in Washington State, and what your options are for enforcing a child support order.

## How Is Child Support Determined in Washington State?

One of the biggest questions many divorced parents have is how their child support will be calculated. Child support in Washington State is determined by the court, and it's the court's job to ensure that child support orders are adequate to meet the basic needs of the child in question. This is usually done by evaluating the combined monthly net income of both parents and how much time the child spends with each parent.

If you're unsure how much child support you may receive once your divorce is finalized, you can use Washington's [Quick Child Support Estimator](#) to get a rough idea. Of course, any final child support amount will be determined by the court and could be higher or lower than estimated. Additionally, a child support order will generally order parents to share certain expenses, such as uncovered medical expenses, daycare expenses, and educational expenses. Once child support is determined, it can be reviewed every two years, or sooner if the financial circumstances of one or both parties change.

## How is Child Support Enforced?

Unfortunately for the parent with primary custody, people who owe child support aren't always keen on paying it, and your ex-partner may refuse to make payments, hide financial assets, or fail to disclose a change in income. This can leave the parent with primary custody struggling to make ends meet. However, the good news is that any parent who fails to pay their

court-ordered child support can actually be held in contempt of court, and they may face serious penalties as a result, including having their wages garnished or having their tax refund intercepted to cover back child support payments.

## What Are My Options if My Ex Refuses to Pay Child Support?

If your ex isn't paying child support, you may be left feeling frustrated and unsure what to do next. Fortunately, since a parent who fails to pay child support is technically in violation of a court order, you do have legal options for ensuring you receive the child support and spousal maintenance owed to you. Depending on how much money your ex owes you, you have several options you can take to hold them accountable for their actions.

### Contact DSHS

One of the best places to start if your ex has not been paying child support as ordered would be to contact the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). Under the DSHS, the Division of Child Support (DCS) acts as the official child support enforcement agency for the state of Washington. State law [allows the DCS to take collection actions](#) against a noncustodial parent who is behind on child support payments.

If your ex is behind on child support payments, you can provide the DCS with a copy of your child support order, and they will act as an intermediary and take any necessary collection actions against your ex. Actions that the DCS can take to collect on child support include:

- Garnishing wages (Including unemployment compensation, workers' compensation payments, and pension payments).
- Suspending their driver's license.
- Intercepting tax refunds.
- Filing liens against, seizing, and selling part or all of the noncustodial parent's real estate, vehicles, or other personal property.
- Reporting the case to credit reporting agencies.
- And/or referring the case to a prosecuting attorney for contempt proceedings or criminal non-support (this could lead to fines or even jail time).

The primary downside of going through the DSHS is that government agencies are slow, and it could take a significant amount of time for your case to be processed. Additionally, the DSHS does not represent you; it represents the state's interests, and they may not advocate for you as strongly as you'd like.

### File a Motion of Contempt

If you want someone by your side who will advocate for you, your best option would be to work with an attorney and file a motion for contempt, particularly if the noncustodial parent owes

you thousands of dollars in missed child support payments. A motion for contempt is a powerful tool, and if you are successful, the court will put in place coercive measures that force the opposing party to comply and pay the child support they owe you. The motion can even result in the opposing party going to jail until he or she starts paying child support, making it an extremely powerful motivator if your ex-partner has been reluctant to make child support payments.

## Consider Contacting an Experienced Attorney

If your spouse has been reluctant to pay child support and they owe you thousands of dollars in missed payments, filing a motion for contempt in your county may be the only way to get them to pay you what you are owed. However, the process of filing a motion for contempt can be surprisingly complex and confusing, which is why it's recommended that you consult an experienced family law attorney when doing so.

An attorney will be able to walk you through the process of filing a motion for contempt, and they will advocate for you throughout contempt proceedings in order to give you the best chances of receiving a favorable outcome.

As a single parent, you should not have to worry about how you will get by because your ex refuses to pay child support. Contact us to find out how we can help you navigate the system and make sure that you and your children get the financial support that you deserve.