

Is My Child Support Too Much, Too Little, or Just Right?

By: Marie White

Your child support order's transfer payment in King County is based on your family's unique situation. There is no standard support payment. The primary factors in setting child support are: (1) the incomes of the parties; (2) the number and ages of the children; (3) whether a parent is paying day care or health insurance for the children; (4) whether either parent is financially responsible for children from other relationships; and (5) other reasons for deviating upward or downward.

The incomes of the parties. If you are planning to ask the court for a child support order or to modify a child support order you already have, be prepared to provide accurate information about your income and to make a good-faith estimate of the other party's income if you don't know what it is. You will need to gather your pay stubs going back at least six months and tax returns for the past two years. If you are self-employed, you will need to provide your business records, including your business tax returns. If you have not filed tax returns, then you will need to provide your W-2 forms if you are an employee or your profit and loss statement if you are self-employed. Both parties will also need to provide a Financial Declaration detailing income, living expenses, and debt expenses.

The number and ages of your children. In King County, the amount of support per child will be lower the more children you have. If your children are over age 11, their child support will be higher. Once you have calculated your incomes, you will refer to the Washington State Child Support Schedule to figure out your monthly child support per child using both the number of children you have and their ages. You will add these numbers to determine the total amount of child support each parent is responsible for. Then you will divide this amount by the percentage of income each parent earns.

Whether a parent is paying day care or health insurance for the children. If either parent is paying these expenses, then that parent is entitled to a credit against his or her share of the basic child support obligation. The credit is not 100%. It is the percent of this additional expense that the other parent should be paying. There are other extraordinary expenses that may also need to be apportioned, such as long distance transportation or private school tuition, any of which would also be divided in the same proportion as the basic support obligation. By now, you should have figured out that accurately calculating the parties' incomes is critical to fairly calculating the child support responsibility. From your incomes flows every other calculation you will make.

Whether either parent is responsible for children from other relationships. The most important factor here is whether the other parent is actually paying for the support of these other children, or if these other children actually live in his or her household. Having a child support order that is not being actually paid does not entitle that parent to a deviation in child support. The second most important factor is that downward deviations are not automatic and are not based on a strict formula. The court engages in a balancing analysis and attempts to allocate the parties' resources as fairly as possible among all the children of blended families. Sometimes this is not entirely possible because an older child support order that is actually being paid can severely limit the paying parent's ability to support later children to the same extent. The perfect solution would be for this parent to ask the court to modify or adjust the first child support order, but we rarely get perfect solutions.

Other reasons for deviating upward or downward. Paragraph 3.7 of the Washington State Order of Child Support contains a checklist of twenty possible bases for ordering either an upward or a downward child support deviation, including financial responsibility for children from other relationships. If you believe that any of the other nineteen reasons apply to you, then you will need to check the box next to that reason. For any of these twenty bases for deviation, you must also complete the last section of that paragraph, "The factual basis for these reasons is as follows." Be sure to include the amount of the deviation that you are requesting in this factual basis.

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