

Legal Rights of Unmarried Parents

In Ohio, if parents are not married, the law does not give them the same rights when a child is born.



Unmarried Mother's Rights

A mother has full custody when a child is born. This means that they have the power to make all the choices for the child, such as:

- Choose where the child lives
- Decide who the child sees
- Sign the child up for school
- Make health care choices
- Apply for benefits
- Apply for child support



Unmarried Father's Rights

A father does not have any custody when a child is born. This means that they can only see the child if the mother agrees and does not have the power to make any of the choices for the child.

If a father wants the right to see or make choices for the child, they must do two things:

1. Prove they are the father (this is called paternity)
2. Turn in papers to court that ask a judge for visitation or custody



Can parents work together without going to court?

Yes. If the mother agrees, the father can spend time with the child.

When working together, parents should:

- Put the child first
- Talk calmly
- Make choices based on what the child needs

If the father applies for custody, the judge will ask if the child spends time with both parents, because this can be good for the child if it is safe.



What if it is not safe to work together?

Sometimes it is not safe to work together.

If there is abuse or violence:

- Talk to a lawyer
- Get help right away



Learn more:

On our website, lasco.org, you can also learn about:

- How does the court decide custody?
- How is Child Support Established
- Visit www.lasco.org/familylaw for other information.

Have Questions? We Can Help.

LASCO can provide free legal help with noncriminal issues.



Call 1-888-246-4420



Online lasco.org

Legal Aid of Southeast and Central Ohio (LASCO) provides free noncriminal legal help to people experiencing poverty, seniors, and veterans in 36 Ohio counties.

This information is based on current law, which is subject to change. If you have questions, contact LASCO. LASCO is an equal opportunity organization and will not allow discrimination of any kind.

