



# Hospital Birth Registrar Script Guide

**PARENT QUESTION: Ok, can you tell me what is paternity establishment?**

**BIRTH REGISTRAR ANSWER:** If you are unmarried when your child is born, there is no legal connection to the father unless you establish paternity. Here at the hospital, we have a voluntary process that you and your boyfriend can complete. You can sign an Acknowledgment of Paternity form.

**PARENT QUESTION: So, we do not have to go to court to establish paternity?**

**BIRTH REGISTRAR ANSWER:** It is simple! If you were unmarried from conception to birth, as the baby's parents you can sign a document called an Acknowledgment of Paternity (AOP) stating the father is the biological parent. You must provide a photo ID, and I will notarize the form.

**PARENT QUESTION: How much does it cost?**

**BIRTH REGISTRAR ANSWER:** It is free if you complete the AOP while in the hospital as part of the birth registration process; plus, it will save you time. If you are unable to complete the AOP while here, you may return at a later date or you may contact the Office of Vital Records, the Division of Child Support Enforcement, or the Virginia Paternity Establishment Program to complete the document. If you complete the form after you leave the hospital, the Office of Vital Records will charge a \$10 fee to add the father's name to the birth certificate.

**PARENT QUESTION: What if I am not sure my boyfriend is the father?**

**BIRTH REGISTRAR ANSWER:** If you are not sure, you should not complete the AOP form. Genetic testing can help you determine whether he is the child's biological father. Genetic testing is a quick and painless way to identify the biological father. They use the buccal swab method where a genetic sample is collected by swabbing the inner facial cheek. You can contact DCSE or a private attorney for assistance. You may also contact a private laboratory listed in the Virginia Paternity Establishment Program brochure.

**PARENT QUESTION: What if he does not want to sign the form?**

**BIRTH REGISTRAR ANSWER:** There are other ways to establish paternity. I can give you contact information for your local Division Child Support Enforcement office. They can help you establish paternity. Another option is to hire a private attorney.

**PARENT QUESTION: Is the AOP just to add father's name on the birth certificate?**

**BIRTH REGISTRAR ANSWER:** No, there are many benefits from establishing paternity, including:

- Complete identity
- Continuity for the child by knowing both parents
- Opportunity for an extended family
- Medical insurance coverage from both parents
- Survivors benefits, veteran's benefits, inheritance rights, pensions, and life insurance
- Support and care from both parents
- Decreased chance of poverty. Research shows that when fathers are involved with their children, the children have: Less criminal involvement, behavioral problems, drug usage, and teenage pregnancy. They also have greater school successes and likelihood of graduating from high school.

**\*REQUIRED STEP:** Ensure the parents have read the written educational materials — most importantly the rights and responsibilities. To comply with federal and state law, verbally review with the parents the description of voluntary paternity acknowledgment, rights and responsibilities, legal consequences, rights of rescission, alternatives to voluntary acknowledgment, and the availability of child support services.

#### Questions and Answers Depending on Other Circumstances

**PARENT QUESTION: Does signing the Acknowledgment of Paternity establish any custody or visitation rights?**

**ANSWER:** No. In Virginia, the mother has sole legal custody when the mother was not married at any time during the pregnancy or after the child's birth until the court orders otherwise. Fathers may ask the court to review the custody arrangements or grant visitation at any time after paternity is established.

**PARENT QUESTION: What if one of us changes our mind after signing the form?**

**ANSWER:** You both should think carefully before establishing paternity. If you do change your mind, you have 60 days from the last notarized signature to rescind the Acknowledgment of Paternity form. Either parent may cancel or "rescind" the AOP by completing a rescission form at the Office of Vital Records, unless a court order has been entered for the child.

**PARENT QUESTION:** Are there any other options available if we do not want to sign the Acknowledgment of Paternity form?

**ANSWER:** Genetic testing is an option. I can provide the contact information for the child support agency for testing or you can contact a private attorney for assistance.

**SITUATION:** Parents unsure about signing the Acknowledgment of Paternity form:

**ANSWER:** If one or both parents seems hesitant, attempt to talk with them separately. The parent might want to ask about genetic testing or there may be issues of abuse. Remember, the Acknowledgment of Paternity form is designed for people who are sure who about who the child's biological father is. If the issue is genetic testing, refer the parents to their local child support agency for genetic testing or to a private attorney for assistance.

**SITUATION:** Mother is married but the husband is not the father.

**ANSWER:** If the mother is married at any time from the time of conception until the time of delivery, the mother and the biological father cannot complete an Acknowledgment of Paternity form as her husband is presumed to be the father by state and federal law.

**SITUATION:** Minor (under age 18) wants to sign the Acknowledgment of Paternity form?

**ANSWER:** There is no minimum age requirement to complete the Acknowledgement of Paternity form in the Commonwealth of Virginia.