



*Where Stylish Moms Meet*

## **Paternity**

Talk about how the birth certificate will read. When the baby is born, have the father sign the birth certificate, but know that paternity can still be challenged by either party later on. “For those who have broken up before the child is born, not registering the father on the birth certificate could allow the new mom to have a little more control over what happens with the baby until such time as the father decides to assert his legal rights (if ever),” says Lisa Helfend Meyer, founding partner of Los Angeles-based family law firm Meyer, Olson, Lowy & Meyers. “On the other hand, if the new mom needs child support, it is imperative to register the father on the birth certificate and file a paternity action immediately, which in many states can be done before the child is even born and can include a contribution toward pre-natal costs.”

## **Custody**

Custody falls into two categories, legal (decisions on behalf of the child on things like education, health care, and religion) and physical (who the child lives with, visitation, etc.). Even if you’re a happy couple now, it’s a good idea to get a custody agreement in writing in case you no longer get along in the future. “In my custody agreements, I usually advise both parents share all decision making and allow a 3rd party such as a social worker make the final call if they just can’t agree. They usually work things out instead of getting the third party involved,” says Joleena Louis, Esq, a family law and custody specialist in New York City. Physical custody should also be laid out now. “Regardless of the child’s age, most courts hold that it is in a child’s best interest to have frequent and meaningful contact with both parents,” notes Jonathan D. Marks, attorney at The Marks Law Firm in St. Louis, MO.

## **Relocation**

“In our increasingly globalized society, many intrastate/international couples are having children,” notes Lisa Helfend Meyer, founding partner of Los Angeles-based family law firm Meyer, Olson, Lowy & Meyers. But even if you’re high-school sweethearts, you never know when one of you will want to move for a job or another reason you can’t foresee now. “Once paternity is established, then neither parent can move more than 50 miles without written permission or a court order. If paternity isn’t established, then the mother is presumed to be the residential parent.

The father cannot stop relocation until paternity is determined by court order,” explains **Lori Barkus**, a South Florida-based family law attorney. Residence is definitely critical to establish as early on as possible. Once a child starts school, it will be much harder legally to remove him or her.

### **Child Support**

The terms are largely dictated by the state, but in general, the income of the parties is typically the determining factor in support. And don’t assume you have an automatic edge as the mom. “Child support is awarded to the parent who has primary custody of the child, no matter whether mother or father,” notes Jennifer A. Brandt, Family Law Attorney with Cozen O’Connor in Philadelphia. To search for lawyers specializing in child support issues as well as mediators and negotiators, go to Avvo.com.

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