

# FACTS ABOUT THE MICHIGAN CHILD SUPPORT FORMULA



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**State Court Administrative Office  
Friend of the Court Bureau  
Michigan Supreme Court**

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The Michigan Child Support Formula (MCSF) provides guidelines to establish child support amounts. Federal law requires each state to have guidelines to determine the children's financial needs and to make sure all similar cases are treated the same.

This brochure answers common MCSF questions. For additional information, please refer to the manual or contact an attorney.

The MCSF Manual is at: <https://www.courts.michigan.gov/mcsf>

### **What is the Michigan Child Support Formula's purpose?**

The MCSF helps courts set an appropriate child support amount for children. The MCSF is based on the children's needs and their parents' resources.

### **How does the MCSF determine children's needs?**

The MCSF is based on economic analysis of facts and data about the costs of raising children at different income levels.

### **What other factors influence the MCSF's child support calculations?**

The MCSF considers both parents' incomes. The formula also makes adjustments for special circumstances such as split custody and number of nights that child(ren) spend in each parent's home.

### **Will my current child support order change if the MCSF suggests a different amount of support?**

The Friend of the Court (FOC) must use the MCSF to make a support recommendation. After the FOC completes a support review, the law requires the FOC to ask the court to change the support amount if support would change at least an increase or decrease of either \$50 per month or ten percent (10%) of the current monthly support amount, whichever is less. If the formula shows a change smaller than that, the FOC is not required to ask the court to change the order.

### **Will the judge order the exact child support amount recommended by the formula?**

Not always, but when judges do not accept the formula's recommendation, the judge must explain why there is a deviation from the recommended amount.

### **How does the MCSF determine the amount that both parents must pay for children's health care expenses?**

It depends on things like the employer-sponsored insurance's availability and cost, the court may order a parent to have health care coverage for the children. The child's share of the cost of insurance premiums is divided between the parents based on their family income share.

In most cases, the formula divides other out-of-pocket (uninsured) health care expenses into two categories: ordinary medical expenses and additional medical expenses. Both parents must help pay for the child's uninsured medical expenses. Ordinary medical expenses are the uninsured costs a support recipient is presumed to expend on a child in a year. The support payer contributes to this amount based on their share of family income in the monthly child support order. Expenses by the support recipient above the presumed ordinary medical amount, and *any* expense by the

support payer, is considered additional medical expenses; and both parents share this amount through additional medical enforcement.

The MCSF assumes the support payee has contributed his or her share. The court will divide (by the percentage of each parent's share of the family income) any out-of-pocket expenses greater than the court's yearly ordinary medical expenses for the payee or payer estimate at a later date.

### **Does the MCSF consider childcare expenses?**

Yes. When either parent has work or education-related childcare expenses while that parent has the child's care, the MCSF divides the cost between the parents based on each parent's share of the family income.

### **What if a parent is not working?**

State law and the MCSF allow the court to consider a parent's potential income. The court can determine if a parent could earn a certain wage based on the parent's skills, knowledge, abilities, and job opportunities in the area. The FOC and the court can then apply the MCSF as if the parent had earned that income.

The FOC must provide the parties and the court with the amount support would be if based only on actual income, and support based on the use of potential income. The FOC must present evidence to support its decision to use potential income. Potential income may also be called "imputed income."

### **What if a parent has a child from another relationship?**

If a parent has a child from a relationship with someone not involved in the case, the MCSF sets aside a portion of the parent's net income for supporting additional children.

### **Are stepchildren considered when making child support recommendations?**

Courts do not consider stepchildren when making child support recommendations. The only exception is when *neither* the stepchild's natural or adoptive parents have income or the ability to earn income.

### **How often is the MCSF updated?**

The MCSF is reviewed every four years; however, changes may be made at anytime to respond to changes in the law.