



GO DIVORCE CLINIC[®]
THE END OF THE UGLY DIVORCE

Approaching Child Support

Getting organized before you record your agreement

For couples with minor children in an uncontested divorce, the subject of child support will need to be addressed. It can be a very touchy subject for parents. Facts help clarify where purely emotional preferences are all that is being considered. It is a time for getting useful budget information together, understanding the required California guideline calculation, and becoming clear about what the two of you agree is in the best interest of the children.

Child Support Calculation Guidelines

California family courts reference an authorized child support calculation in every case involving minor children. You will need to provide a child support calculation result with your judgment if you have minor children, regardless of whether you agree to having one parent pay child support to the other or to not have a child support payment. The California Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) provides an official online Guideline Calculator that can be used to estimate the guideline amount and provide a printable result for your judgment. The DCSS California Child Support Guideline Calculator has proven to be our clients' most common resource for child support calculations, as it is free and relatively easy to navigate. The calculator is currently certified by the Judicial Council for use in California courts—but that can change. Other child support calculation programs are also certified by the Judicial Council. Because certification status can change, you can check the Judicial Council's current list of certified Guideline Support Calculators. The calculator uses information supplied by the parents and produces an estimate; the court has final authority over the amount of a child support order.

For GDC clients, the calculator provides a relatively neutral reference, but variables such as your personal budgets, children's extracurricular activities, private school tuition and local cost of living can bring realities into the picture that may affect your considerations beyond the calculation results. GDC does not calculate child support for you, decide what information should be entered, interpret the calculator results, or recommend a support amount.

Have the Information in Front of You

A child support calculation depends on financial and parenting information. Before trying to finish this part of your divorce, make sure both parents have at least the basic information for inputs needed to complete the calculation. More detailed inputs may be available on any given child support software.

- Current income information for each parent
- The parenting-time schedule the parents have agreed to
- Tax-filing information requested by the calculator
- Health-insurance information and costs, when applicable
- Child-care or other child-related expenses requested by the calculator
- Other financial information requested by the official calculator

Know the Guideline Number

Most often, we have experienced that parents reach their own agreements and do not conform exactly to the guideline amount. Knowing the guideline number remains an important part of the process, but the ultimate decision about the amount you agree upon to submit to the Court is yours. The GDC Portal MSA Builder allows you to record the child support agreement the two of you have reached.

Support Considerations & Modifying Support

The monthly support amount is not the only child-related financial issue parents may need to address. As you work through your agreement, make sure you have also discussed the practical expenses that will continue as you co-parent.

- Health insurance for the children
- Uncovered medical or health-care expenses
- Child-care expenses
- Travel or transportation expenses connected with parenting time
- Other recurring child-related expenses the parents want to address

Because the above issues and other financial circumstances can change, child support orders can be modified in the future by agreement between the parents or by Court order. For now, you are making a child support order that works for your current circumstances.

Child Support Logistics

Before completing the child support portion of the GDC Portal MSA Builder, each parent should be able to describe the agreement clearly. Who will pay support? What is the monthly amount? When will it begin? How is the payment made? What guideline amount did the official calculation produce? How will the parents handle the other child-related expenses they have chosen or are required to address?

If those answers are still changing, the issue may not be ready to record. Continue the discussion, use a separate neutral mediation process if appropriate, or seek outside professional help before finalizing the agreement.

Official California Resources

California Child Support Guideline Calculator:
<https://childdsupport.ca.gov/guideline-calculator/>

California Courts — Child Support:
<https://selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/child-support>

California Courts — Child Support Resources:
<https://selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/child-support/resources>

The decisions remain yours. GDC provides the structure for recording them.

GDC is not a law firm and does not provide legal advice. This resource provides general educational and organizational information for GDC Portal users. GDC does not determine child support, interpret the California guideline, recommend a support amount, or advise either parent concerning legal rights or obligations.