

The Michigan Child Support Formula (MCSF) manual provides guidelines that establish child support obligations. To assure that courts order similar amounts in similar cases, federal law requires states to have such guidelines. You can find the Michigan Child Support Formula Manual at your local library or on the Michigan Supreme Court's "One Court of Justice" web page at <http://courts.michigan.gov/scao/services/focb/focb.htm>.

This brochure addresses common questions regarding the MCSF manual. If you need additional information, please refer to the manual or contact an attorney.

**(1) What is the purpose of the child support formula?**

The primary purpose of the formula is to provide adequate financial support for children. The formula is based on both the needs of children and the resources of their parents. The formula ensures uniformity throughout the state and increases the predictability of child support awards.

**(2) How does the formula determine children's needs?**

Federal and Michigan laws require the formula to determine that children's financial needs are met without impoverishing either parent. The formula was created using statistics and other research data provided by nationally recognized experts in the field of family economics to establish the costs of raising children.

**(3) What other factors influence the formula's child support calculations?**

The formula takes into consideration the net incomes of both parents. It then adjusts for factors like other support orders, other natural or adopted children, and mandatory employment expenses. The formula also makes adjustments for special circumstances such as split custody arrangements and the number of nights that children actually spend in each parent's home.

**(4) Will my current child support order change if the formula suggests a different amount of support?**

The friend of the court (FOC) is required to use the formula when making a support recommendation. After the FOC completes a support review, the law requires the FOC to ask the court to change the support amount when a minimum "threshold of change" is reached. That threshold is defined as an increase or decrease of \$50 per month or ten percent (10%) of the current monthly support amount, whichever is more. If the formula calculates a change smaller than that threshold, the FOC usually will not ask the court to change the order.

**(5) Will the judge automatically order the exact child support amount recommended by the formula?**

Not automatically. But when judges don't follow the formula, they must explain why.

**(6) How does the formula determine the amount that both parents must pay for their children's health care expenses?**

Depending on things like the availability and cost of employer-sponsored insurance, the court usually will order one or both parents to maintain health care coverage for the children. The cost of insurance premiums is divided between the parents.

In most cases, the formula divides other out-of-pocket health care expenses into two categories: ordinary and extraordinary. Both parents must contribute an amount toward the child's ordinary expenses. The support payer's portion usually will be included as part of the monthly support payment. The support payee is presumed to have contributed his or her share. Any of the payee's out-of-pocket amounts that exceed the court's estimate of annual ordinary expenses will be divided between the parents at a later date. If the payer's share of ordinary expenses is included in the support amount, any of the payer's out-of-pocket expenses will be divided between the parties at a later date. Please refer to the formula manual for more specific details regarding health care expenses of children.

**(7) Does the formula consider child care expenses?**

When either parent has work or education-related child care expenses during periods when that parent is responsible for the child's care, the formula splits those expenses between the parents.

**(8) What if I don't have any income?**

Even if you have no income, the court may order that you contribute a minimum amount to support your child.

In addition, the formula allows the FOC to “impute” income to you. That means that if you have the ability to earn a certain amount, but you have voluntarily chosen to reduce your income, the FOC and the court will apply the formula as if you had earned the income that you chose not to earn. When imputing income, the FOC will provide the court with two support recommendations, one that is based on your actual income, and the second that is based on your actual income *plus the imputed income*. The FOC must present evidence to support its decision to impute income.

**(9) What if I have a child from another relationship?**

If a parent has a child from a relationship with someone who is not involved in the case under consideration, the formula sets aside a portion of the parent’s net income to pay support for that child.

**(10) Are stepchildren considered when making child support recommendations?**

Generally, no. The only exception is when *neither* of the stepchild’s natural or adoptive parents has income or the ability to earn income.

**(11) How often is the Michigan Child Support Formula updated?**

The MCSF is reviewed every four years. Just because it is reviewed does not mean that it will be changed.

For more detailed answers to any questions or concerns, parents and other interested persons

should refer to the formula manual. The manual can be viewed or printed at: <http://courts.michigan.gov/scao/services/focb/mcsf.htm>. In addition, many public libraries have printed copies of the manual. Several publishing companies sell printed copies.

## Facts About the Michigan Child Support Formula



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Michigan Supreme Court  
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PSA 24 (10/10)  
This publication is produced with IV-D funds

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