

# What We Know

## ARTICLES & INSIGHTS

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tomomi joined Smith Debnam in 2022 and represents clients in family law, including separation and divorce, equitable distribution, alimony, post-separation support, child custody, child support, prenuptial, postnuptial agreements, and domestic violence. She earned her B.A. *magna cum laude* from Brown University and her J.D. from Harvard Law School.

## Basics of Calculating North Carolina Child Support

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### Who Has to Pay Child Support?

In North Carolina, the biological or adoptive parents are almost always on the hook for child support. Only in very limited circumstances is someone else, like a step-parent, held responsible for child support instead of the natural parent. Whether you are separating from your spouse or your child's natural mother or father has never lived with the child, you may be eligible for child support.

### What is Child Support Used For?

The idea behind child support is to provide reasonable living expenses for the needs of the child. North Carolina [Child Support Guidelines](#) govern the calculation and amount of child support. The [Guidelines](#) have a schedule of "basic child support obligations," which is based on economic data that compiled average family expenditures for minor children. On top of these "basic child support obligations," specific categories like health insurance premiums, work-related childcare expenses, and what is called "other extraordinary expenses" are added to calculate the total child support obligation. While child support is calculated by accounting for such expenses and with the intent of covering such expenses, at the end of the day, child support is just a lump sum of money paid by the noncustodial parent every month to be used at the discretion of the custodial parent.

### What is the Average Amount of Child Support for One Child?

In North Carolina, child support is calculated based on the parents' relative incomes. The goal of the [Guidelines](#) is to provide the child the same proportion of income from each parent they would get if they all lived together. Because child support is so dependent on each parent's income, i.e., it could be as low as \$50 per child or as high as \$2505 per child (or more if you are off the guidelines), it is not practical nor helpful to determine an "average" amount of child support.

### How Do You Calculate Child Support?

The [Guidelines](#) have worksheets that will calculate your child support for you. The first step is to determine which worksheet to use, which depends on the separation agreement and custodial arrangement. For example, if the child lives with one parent more than 243 nights out of the year, you are on [Worksheet A](#). If the child lives with each parent at least 123 nights out of the year, you use [Worksheet B](#). (There is also a less commonly used [Worksheet C](#) in split custody cases).

Once you know which worksheet you are on, step one will be to determine the gross income of each parent. This covers ALL income from pretty much any source, from salary and bonuses to income from running a business, renting property, retirement and pensions, capital gains, insurance benefits, etc. The [Guidelines](#) have a complete list. If both parents are W-2 employees, this step should be straightforward. When a parent is self-employed or receives income outside of regular salary, this step may be more complicated. Make sure that you use pre-tax numbers.

From the gross income number, each parent then gets deductions for any children that they already pay support for or live with, other than the child for whom you are determining child support. If a parent already pays financial support for another child, you enter this amount. If a parent lives with another child, you enter the number of other children.

Next, you plug in the following categories if they apply:

- Any childcare costs that each parent incurs for the child while they are working
- Any health insurance premium costs that each parent is paying for the child; and
- "Other extraordinary expenses" – this is very limited in scope and only covers things like special education or travel expenses.

If you are on [Worksheet A](#), that is all the information you need to compute child support. In short, the worksheet will take the gross incomes minus the deductions to determine the basic child support obligation (from the schedule mentioned above), add the three categories of specific expenses to determine the total child support obligation, then apportion that total child support obligation amount to each parent based on the proportion of their incomes.

If you are on [Worksheet B](#), all the above steps will apply, except that you must also enter the number of custodial nights each parent has. Without going into the details, the worksheet will further account for the amount of time the child lives with each parent.

### **Do the Guidelines Always Apply to All Child Support Cases?**

The [Guidelines](#) will almost always apply, but there are exceptions. For instance, the [Guidelines](#) will not apply if the parents' combined incomes exceed \$30,000 per month (i.e., \$360,000 per year). There are also other limited circumstances in which the Court can deviate from the [Guidelines](#).

Whether or not the [Guidelines](#) apply to you, if you need to calculate child support in

North Carolina, you should review the actual [Guidelines](#), which include the schedule and worksheets discussed above. The [NC child support calculator](#) is another resource intended to help parents determine how much money they will pay in monthly child support.

## **LEARN MORE ABOUT CALCULATING YOUR CHILD SUPPORT OBLIGATION WITH SMITH DEBNAM**

At Smith Debnam Law, we specialize in family law and can help you understand your rights and obligations with regard to child support. To learn more about calculating your child support obligation, [contact us today](#)

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