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Child Support Payments

Parents have an ongoing obligation to provide financial support for their children, which continues following separation and until the child turns 18. This obligation is known as Child Support (or Child Maintenance).

Child Support covers expenses for children such as food, housing, clothes, school costs and other activities. It applies to all parents whether married, in a de facto relationship, who have never lived together, never had a relationship, and also may include same-sex parents.

The Child Support Agency (CSA), which is the Australian Government's agency that looks after child support payments, uses a mathematical formula to work out how much child support should be paid. Following application to the CSA, a child support assessment takes into account factors such as the number of children involved, the age of the children, the income of the parents, and the level of care each parent provides for the children.

Once the assessment has been completed, parents can make private payment arrangements, or ask CSA to collect these payments. The Child Support Agency has an extensive website which many parents find helpful. www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/child-support-basics.

Payments to third parties made for the benefit of the child can reduce the monthly amount of cash child support payable. This can be either by agreement between the parents, or even if there is no agreement, a parent can ask the CSA to credit certain "prescribed expenses" payments of up to 30% of their cash child support liabilities.

The "prescribed expenses" include:

- Child care payment.
- School or pre-school fees.
- School uniforms and prescribed text books.
- Medical and dental expenses.
- Housing expenses such as mortgage repayments, rent or bond payments.
- Motor vehicle costs.

A parent can apply to the CSA to change a child support assessment due to special circumstances.

This could take into account:

- The high costs of spending time with your child (e.g. if the parents live a long way apart)
- Caring for your child (e.g. the child needs braces on their teeth)
- Educating your child (e.g. if the parents have agreed the child should attend a non-government school)
- The assessment does not properly reflect one or both parent's capacity to pay child support in some other way.

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Parents can enter into “child support agreements”, which can outline the amount, frequency and method of payments. LifeWorks recommends independent legal advice before entering into such an agreement.

Child Support is quite distinct from any Spousal Maintenance paid to support a former partner. See information sheet on Spousal Maintenance.