



Child Support: Getting Yours...Or Not

One of the consequences of divorce, if children are involved, is child support. If you're one of the fortunate custodial parents who's receiving all the financial support that you're entitled to, congratulations! You're in a statistical minority, however. When it comes to child support, the facts are pretty dismal. In Florida, 826,000 children are owed **\$4 billion** in support, and only 39% have received at least **one payment!** In fact, only 25% of all cases receive total payments! If you're receiving support, or are trying to collect, I recommend you check out the ACES (Association for Children for Enforcement of Support) website at www.childsupport-aces.org and consider becoming a member.

If a NCP (non-custodial parent) has made a determination *not* to pay and avoids payment by moving or quitting his job, you face the uphill battle of getting your money. If you're willing to delegate the task of locating the missing NCP to the Florida Department of Revenue, you may have a long wait. They're effective, but slow, and usually have to rely on the NCP to show up "in the system" before any collection action can be taken. If you're not in a position to wait, or want to be proactive in the process, there are three steps to take at this point: *location*, *verification*, and *determination*. You'll notice I didn't include *collection*; there is a reason.

Professional investigators are typically called in to assist with the first two steps, *location* and *verification*. Obviously, in order to collect anything, you need to know *where* the NCP is living. Don't fall for the hype of the "data detectives" who are advertising all over the Internet that you can find anybody for free. Most legitimate database companies market identification information (including addresses and vehicle registrations) exclusively to licensed investigative agencies, government and law enforcement agencies. The information is compiled from public records of hundreds of state and Federal agencies, but assembled by the database company for the professional to access for a fee. This data is closely monitored in accordance with the Fair Credit Reporting Act and the recent Gramm-Leach-Bliley (GLB) Act. It is not marketed to the general public.

For the novice searching for the NCP who's "disappeared" or who won't divulge his residence and isn't abiding by the court's orders, I suggest a book by private investigator Joseph Culligan titled, *You Can Find Anybody* (© 2000, by JoDere Group, Inc., available at www.amazon.com). Culligan provides information on a wide range of public records that can help you find the wayward NCP.

Step two is *verification*; now that you've found your NCP, you need to verify where he's employed. Contrary to popular media, this is rarely accomplished by tickling a keyboard. Most NCP's I've encountered who've made the decision not to pay are willing to drive to other counties, or even states, to work, and thus avoid detection of their employer by their former spouse. If the NCP is one of the increasing number of workers who 'morph' into new industries or technologies, it won't be as simple as calling every mechanic's shop in your city. You may have to have him followed.

Surveillance is difficult; it should *not* be undertaken by amateurs ("We are professionals, do not attempt this at home," as the disclaimer warns) because of the risks involved. These include, first, your safety; second, your exposure. Modern surveillance typically involves two-man teams equipped with separate vehicles and radios (unless you're a government agency; they get ten- and twelve-man teams *and* a helicopter!) If you have an interest, contact a local community college that provides a college course on surveillance taught by an experienced private investigator.

If your investigation uncovers the NCP's employer, the rest is simple: contact the clerk's office or state agency handling your collection and they will send a nasty-gram to the NCP's boss and bookkeeper, who will comply with the income deduction order, or be dragged into court and fined. Trust me, they'll pay.

Perhaps your investigation *hasn't* identified an employer. What then? Or what if you accomplish steps one and two, collect on the IDO for a couple of months, and then the money stops again? Now you need to make a *determination*. How badly do you need the money? For many parents, it's life or death. They *need* the money, and have to rely on state and federal agencies to find the deadbeat, drag him into court, and threaten him with jail.

But for a significant number of parents, the forced collection of support from a NCP who won't pay is often more emotionally damaging than financially rewarding. I have personal experience to substantiate this. After several years of tracking, following, and filing, the emotional toll became too high a price for the limited income it provided. Am I suggesting that a custodial parent forego the justly-awarded financial support that a NCP is legally and ethically bound to provide? Absolutely not. I am suggesting, however, that there are certain situations where the custodial parent *may* be in a financial position to avoid acrimonious litigation with a deadbeat NCP. My wife and I can personally testify to the long-term benefit of letting *some* sleeping dogs lie. This solution is not for

everyone, but it should be considered in the custodial parent's overall family and financial plan.

Call us at **561-687-8381** or visit us at www.radioinvestigator.com for more information about locating non-custodial parents or other matters related to fraud, embezzlement, or theft.