

CSA and receiving parents

If you are owed child support, you may have the information to help the CSA collect your outstanding payments.

The Child Support Agency (CCSA) aims to ensure children can rely on their parents for the emotional support necessary for their wellbeing. When parents don't receive payments in full and on time, this can make life difficult. The CSA is doing everything we can to make sure parents receive the right amount, however, there are things that you can do to help us ensure that your children are supported.

Keep CSA informed

If you are owed child support, you may have information to help CSA collect your outstanding payments.

Information such as where your ex-partner is working, where they bank, how they structure their income or if they have moved house can be vital. This information is then used by our customer service officers to find the paying parent and work with them to regularly pay the right amount on time.

Keep CSA up-to-date

To ensure you are receiving the right amount of child support it is important to keep your details up-to-date. If any of your details change make sure you tell the CSA as soon as possible. This includes:

- your contact details
- care arrangements
- income, or
- relationship status.

Don't want to rock the boat?

If you have applied to receive child support but have any concerns for your personal safety, it is important to speak to the CSA and a social worker at Centrelink. Centrelink can provide support and, where appropriate, can provide benefits in place of child support payments.

The CSA has a sensitive approach to collecting child support payments, and hopes to minimise the impact on both parents and children.

A good outcome for both sides

A mum who was the receiving parent told the CSA the paying parent was incorrectly stating his income. The CSA investigated both parents' financial circumstances and found that the father was earning more than shown in the child support assessments. The dad had a 'nil' income assessment and had not paid child support. Following the investigation and new assessment, the dad's child support payments rose from nil to \$11,400 a year. Satisfied with the process, the dad is now making voluntary payments. When doing investigations CSA will consider evidence relating to both parents to ensure a balanced outcome.

Compliance strategy

For more information about CSA's compliance strategy - *CSA: Supporting parents to meet their child support responsibilities 2008-2010* or for more fact sheets on this subject visit www.csa.gov.au

Our approach to transferring child support

Our approach differs for each parent, according to their motivation to pay and the likelihood of them meeting their responsibilities. To ensure appropriate financial support is provided to children, we aim to provide parents with the right balance of customer service, education and enforcement activities.

Parents ' behaviour		Our approach
Customers meeting their child support responsibilities through voluntary arrangements	We support parents to meet their child support responsibilities	Make it easy
Customers meeting their child support responsibilities with the assistance of CSA		Provide support education and assistance
Customers who seek to minimise or avoid their child support responsibilities		Deter by detection and the appropriate choice of enforcement action

Compliance activities

- **Employer withholding of arrears (EEWA)** – is where employers are legally required to collect outstanding amounts of child support from employees' wages or salaries. This amount may vary each pay depending on the amount owed. EWA is an administrative cost to business.
- **Lodgement enforcement** – the CSA works with the Australian Taxation Office to encourage child support customers to lodge their tax returns in a timely way so that child support assessments are accurate.

- **Tax return intercept** – where tax has been overpaid, the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) is obliged to refund the excess. The ATO will inform the CSA when a refund is available to a parent with outstanding child support. The CSA may take that amount from the refund.
- **Optical surveillance** – in our more serious cases we may also use optical surveillance to assist us in investigating complex avoidance and minimisation arrangements.
- **Customer tracing** – the CSA uses a range of information from the ATO, Centrelink and other government agencies to find customers and ensure that they have paid the correct amount.
- **Departure Prohibition Orders (DPOs)**– are used to stop parents with large amounts of outstanding child support from leaving Australia until adequate payment arrangements are made. DPOs are a last resort and only issued after in-depth consideration of all relevant information about a person's situation are taken into account.
- **Income minimisers** – this project involves increasing the number of assessments on cases where there is evidence the taxable income of either or both parents may not accurately reflect their income, property and/or financial resources.

Minimising income to pay less child support

A dad's taxable income dropped by about \$665,000 after he entered a business partnership with a family member. As a result of evidence provided, the CSA investigated both parents' financial situation and found that the dad's financial arrangements suggested he was minimising his income so he could pay less child support. The dad, who owned property in New South Wales and Queensland, was paying about \$88,000 a year (or \$1154 a week) in child support for his children. A review of the case resulted in his income for child support purposes increasing to more than \$1100,000. As a result, his new child support payments were increased to more than \$116,000 a year, or about \$3300 a week.

- **Prosecution** – this step is available to us for the most serious actions or omissions involving criminal behaviour by customers or employers.
- **Litigation** – targets parents who continue to avoid child support payments. This option is used only after CSA has made significant attempts to use other enforcement options. Where an asset or income stream is identified as belonging to the parent, CSA will take parents to court to obtain outstanding child support payments.

A serious step achieves a good result

A mum who consistently failed to meet her child support obligations had overdue child support payments of \$228,933. The mum failed to agree to any arrangement to clear the arrears and had only ever made one voluntary payment of \$22,713. After investigating a number of other avenues the case was referred to the CSA's litigation team. The team investigated the parent's income and assets and a subsequent Letter of Demand was issued. Prior to the Federal Magistrates Court drawing up any orders, the mum agreed to make a lump sum payment and an amount of \$229,000 was received. The amount cleared all outstanding child support and costs incurred. The dad was extremely happy with the result, which benefits their children.

For further information and help

Call CSA on **131 272**,

Call the Telephone Interpreting Service on **131 450**

Visit the CSA website www.csa.gov.au

Ask your representative to assist.

Support Services

Family Relationship Advice Line

Phone: **1800 050 321**

www.familyrelationships.gov.au

8am–8pm weekdays, 10am –4pm Sat. (public holidays excluded)

Assists people from families affected by relationship or separation issues.

Other CSA resources:

Getting Started —information about child support for separated parents.

Me and My series of self-help booklets (available in a range of languages and as audio downloads).

Dealing with Separation interactive CD Rom.

Family Separation: a guide for teens —helping young people cope with family separation and change.

CSAonline —this is a secure online service where you can view and update your child support information when it suits you. Go to www.csa.gov.au to enrol.

To order any free CSA publication or more fact sheets visit www.csa.gov.au or freecall **1800 040 972** (charges apply to mobile and public phones).

Your privacy

CSA collects information about you and your family for child support purposes. We understand that some information is sensitive, and we place great importance on protecting your privacy. For more information see the *Privacy* fact sheet.

The Australian Government Services Fraud tip-off line

The Australian Government Services Fraud tip-off line provides people with a place to report suspected fraud against Centrelink, Medicare, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme or the Child Support Agency. If you have information about someone who is mis-using government services, call **131 524**.

*Call charges may apply to the telephone numbers listed.

† Please note: your call may be recorded.

Do you need interpreting help?

If you don't speak English and need help from CSA, ring the Telephone Interpreting Service on **131 450**.

CSA 4076.03.08