



## TANF and Teen Parents

### I'm a teen parent. Can I get help from TANF?

Maybe. You *maybe* able to get help from Maine's TANF Program if you are under 18 and your children live with you, or you are under 18 and pregnant.

### How can I get help from the TANF Program?

Maine's TANF Program provides monthly cash help to families in need. It also provides help with education, training, employment, and support services through the ASPIRE Program.

If you are *under 18 years of age* and want these benefits, you must be:

- Low income
- Parenting your own child(ren) or pregnant
- Living with your parent(s), legal guardian, an adult relative or another DHHS-approved living arrangement *unless you have "good cause"* to live on your own. (See below); **AND**
- Enrolled in a high school program *unless you have good cause*. For more information about "Good Cause," see Maine Equal Justice's guide to TANF.

### What if I can't or don't want to live with my parent(s) or legal guardian?

Sometimes living with your parents or legal guardian can be hard or dangerous. If you do not want to live with them because of physical or emotional abuse, or another good reason, be sure to tell your Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) case worker. If you have a good reason, you may be able to get TANF living on your own or with another adult or supervised setting approved by DHHS.

Some circumstances under which you may be able to get TANF even if you don't live with your parent(s) or guardian are:

- You have no living parent or don't know where your parents are;
- Neither of your parents will let you live with them;
- DHHS thinks that your physical or emotional health or safety would be in danger if you lived with your parent;
- You have lived apart from your parent for at least one year before your child's birth; or
- DHHS thinks you have another good reason for not living with either parent

If you cannot live with your parents, you may live with another adult relative who is at least 18. You can also live in another living arrangement approved by DHHS, including living on your own.

If you are living with the father of your child and he is 18 or older, then requirements about living with another adult do not apply. However, you will still need to meet the TANF eligibility requirements for two-parent families. This means that one of the parents must be incapacitated or unemployed as defined in the TANF rules.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Just because you are “legally emancipated” doesn’t mean you have good cause. You still need to prove that you have good cause for not living with a parent or other adult.

### Where can I apply for TANF? How soon will I begin receiving benefits?

Apply for TANF at your local DHHS office. You can find the nearest office at this website:

- [http://gateway.maine.gov/dhhs-apps/office\\_finder/](http://gateway.maine.gov/dhhs-apps/office_finder/) or you can apply on-line by searching for My Maine Connection or going to: <https://www1.maine.gov/benefits/account/login.html>

A decision will be made on your application within 30 days of application. If you are eligible, you should receive a benefit no later than 45 days from the day you applied.

If you are denied TANF benefits you have a right to a “fair hearing.” A fair hearing is a chance to explain why you think you should get TANF. Be sure to ask for a fair hearing within 30 days of the denial.

You may be able to get legal help for the hearing by contacting your local office of Pine Tree Legal Assistance. You can find the Pine Tree office nearest you at this website: <http://www.ptla.org/ptlasite/cliented/contact.htm>.

### If I do get TANF, how much money will I get?

The amount of your TANF grant depends on: (1) how many children you have; (2) how much income you have from other sources like work or child support; and (3) how much you pay for housing.

If you are a single parent with one child and no other income, your TANF grant will be \$456 a month. If you pay 50% or more of your income for housing, you will be eligible for an additional \$300 per month in a Special Needs Housing Allowance. Housing costs include: rent, including lot rent; mortgage payments; property taxes; and homeowner’s insurance.

### How will I get my TANF grant?

In most cases minor parents under 18 do not receive their own TANF check. They are paid through a “protective payee.” This could be your parent or some other adult you trust. If you are under 18 in most cases your TANF will be paid as follows:

- Rent or other shelter payments are sent directly to the landlord
- Utility payments (like lights or gas) are sent directly to the utility
- Any amount that is left is sent to a “protective payee” who must use the money on your behalf.

If you cannot identify someone to act as your “protective payee” you may be able to receive the TANF benefit directly.

### Can I get help with child care or other services I need to go to school?

Yes, as long as you are meeting the school requirements you can get help with child-care, transportation, and other support services you need to stay in school. See Maine Equal Justice information on TANF/ASPIRE for information about support services available to participants in the ASPIRE Program.

### I’m under 18 and a parent. Do I have to go to school if my child is under one year old?

Yes, if you do not have a high school diploma or equivalency certificate. If you have a good reason for not being able to meet all or part of the school attendance requirement, you can ask that they be changed. See Maine Equal Justice information on TANF/ASPIRE for information about good cause for parents who cannot meet all or part of their ASPIRE requirements.

### Do I have to help the State collect child support for me to get help from TANF?

Maybe. To get help from the TANF Program, you will be asked to identify your child’s other parent and may be asked to help the State collect child support from that parent. *However*, you have a right to claim “good cause” so that you don’t have to do this if you think that it could result in harm to you or your child. “Good cause” means that:

- You believe that going after child support could place you or your child in physical or emotional harm;
- The child was conceived by rape or incest; or
- Adoption proceedings are pending.

If I am living with my parents, how will their income affect my TANF benefits?

It depends on your situation. Here are some examples.

- **Situation #1: You are a minor parent living with your parent(s), and *your parents* are parenting your children.** In this case your parent(s) must apply for both you and your child. You will all be on the same TANF grant. The income of your parents will count.
- **Situation #2: You are a minor parent living with your parents; *you* are parenting your child. No brothers or sisters live with you.** In this case, you can choose whether to include your parent(s) on the grant or not. If your parent(s) have very little income and assets, you may get more help if you include them on the TANF grant. If they do have income they can decide not to be included on the TANF grant. But, even if they are not on the TANF grant, some of their income will be counted as income to you. This may mean you can't get TANF.
- **Situation #3: You are a minor parent living in a family that qualifies for TANF. *You* are parenting your child and at least one of your brothers or sisters lives with you.** In this case the whole family must be on the same grant and the income of all family members will be counted.

The people considered part of the household, or assistance unit, can vary. It depends on factors such as who is caring for the baby and whether there are siblings. If you are not sure who is part of your household or if you have questions about your eligibility for TANF, call Maine Equal Justice Partners at 207-626-7058 extension 205.