

Who's your daddy?

Identifying or confirming the father of a child is often very important in child maintenance cases, inheritance claims, and other situations.

Issued by [Health DiRxions](#) 22 Oct 2007

In the event of a dispute, one or both parties may demand that a paternity test is carried out.

Knowing who his/her biological parents is also usually important for the future well-being of a child. Children uncertain about this relationship may suffer from low self-esteem, anxiety and increased antisocial behaviour. When paternity is questioned and tested, families are advised to seek counselling to counteract any negative impact on a child's sense of self and belonging.

Paternity tests are based on genetic variability. This means that most individuals are likely to have two different variants of one particular gene – one from the mother and one from the father. Comparing the child's DNA pattern with that of the alleged father provides the evidence of a biological relationship.

There are many different types of paternity tests. However, in South Africa, the most accurate test used is DNA profiling. Dr. Carolyn Tsilimigras of Lancet Laboratories, a member of the National Pathology Group said they do roughly 130 paternity tests per month.

“There are many different reasons to establish paternity. The need for financial and emotional support, identifying deceased family or simply for peace of mind are amongst these reasons,” she said.

Lancet Laboratories use a fully automated system which analyses six different gene systems. The genetic systems selected for DNA profiling are located on different chromosomes. This greatly diminishes the probability of a random match, as well as the influence of a blood relationship between the alleged father and the biological father on the test results. DNA profiling produces results within four days and has a 99.999% accuracy rate. The cost of the test is R1,000 per profile, and is not covered by medical aid.

While there are no South African statistics available, researchers in Britain estimate that 4% of fathers are raising non-biological offspring.

A recent case in the public eye took place when model and actress Liz Hurley gave birth to her baby boy, Damian. Convinced that he was not Damian's father, Steve Bing, grandson of New York property magnate Leo Bing, demanded a paternity test to prove this. However, the results revealed that he was in fact, the father of Damian.

In another similar example, a paternity test carried out by a Russian model proved that Boris Becker was the biological father of her child despite his original denials.

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