

Child Passport Application Guide

Your step-by-step resource for U.S. passport applications for minors (under 16)



Updated for

Key Statistics

Important numbers to know when applying for a child's passport:



\$135 Total Cost

For a child's passport book (\$100 application + \$35 execution fee)



4-6 Weeks

Standard processing time plus mailing (6-10 weeks total)



5 Years

Validity period for children's passports (under age 16)



3 Months

Maximum age for notarized consent forms

Understanding these key timeframes and costs will help you plan your child's passport application process effectively.



Understanding Children's Passport Requirements

What Makes Children's Passports Different

Children under 16 have stricter passport rules than adult applications for important safety reasons. Federal law requires both parents to consent before issuing travel documents to minors to prevent international child abduction. Unlike adults, children cannot renew expired passports and must reapply each time using Form DS-11. Children's passports are valid for only five years compared to ten years for adults.



Passport Book vs. Passport Card for Children

Feature	Passport Book	Passport Card
Cost	\$135 total	\$50 total
International Air Travel	✓ Yes	✗ No
Land/Sea Travel to Canada, Mexico, Caribbean	✓ Yes	✓ Yes
All International Travel	✓ Yes	✗ No
Validity Period	5 years	5 years
Real ID Compliant	✓ Yes	✓ Yes

Recommendation: Choose the passport book for maximum travel flexibility, or get both for \$150 total to save \$20 and have a backup travel document.

Essential Document Checklist

Form DS-11 (Application for U.S. Passport)

- Mandatory for all children under 16
- Complete online at travel.state.gov or print and fill by hand
- **CRITICAL:** Do NOT sign the form before your appointment
- You and your child will sign it at the acceptance facility when instructed by an agent

Proof of U.S. Citizenship (Original or Certified Copy)

- Your child's original birth certificate with official seal is required
- Must list both parents' full names and be issued by city, county, or state
- Consular Report of Birth Abroad (CRBA)
- Certificate of Citizenship
- Previous undamaged U.S. passport

Paper Only: You cannot submit digital evidence of U.S. citizenship, such as a mobile or electronic birth certificate. All citizenship proof must be a physical, original, or certified copy.

Additional Required Documents

- Photocopy of Citizenship Document (Black and white copy on 8.5" x 11" paper, single-sided)
- Proof of Parental Relationship (Birth certificate listing parent(s), adoption decree, or court-ordered custody documentation)
- Parental Identification (Valid government-issued photo ID for each appearing parent)
- Photocopies of Parental ID (Clear photocopies of front and back of each parent's ID)
- Passport Photo (One 2" x 2" color photo taken within the last 6 months)

Passport Photo Requirements

- Plain white or off-white background
- Neutral expression, both eyes open (relaxed for infants)
- No glasses, hats, or headphones
- Religious head coverings permitted
- **Important:** Photo rejections are common due to incorrect specifications
- **Do not staple or attach the photo to the form.** The acceptance agent will review the photo and affix it to

Parental Consent Requirements

The Two-Parent Rule Explained

Federal law requires consent from both parents for children under 16. Here's how to meet this requirement based on your situation:



Both Parents Attend

What You Need:

- Both parents present at appointment
- Both parents bring valid photo ID
- Both parents sign DS-11 at the facility

Process: Simplest and fastest option with no additional forms required



One Parent Cannot Attend

What You Need:

- Attending parent brings valid ID
- Absent parent completes Form DS-3053 (Statement of Consent)
- Notarized DS-3053 (must be notarized within 3 months)
- Photocopy of absent parent's ID (same ID shown to notary)



Sole Legal Custody

What You Need:

- Court order granting sole custody
- Divorce decree specifying sole custody
- Birth certificate listing only one parent
- Death certificate (if other parent is deceased)

Process: Only custodial parent needs to appear



Cannot Locate Other Parent

What You Need:

- Form DS-5525 (Statement of Special Family Circumstances)
- Detailed explanation of efforts to locate other parent
- Supporting evidence of attempts to contact

Note: Does not guarantee passport approval

Important Details: Notarization must occur within 3 months of application. Absent parent must appear before notary in person. Copy of ID must match the one presented to notary. Electronic notarization is accepted only if legally valid in your state.

Step-by-Step Application Process

Preparation (1-2 weeks before)

1. Gather all required documents
2. Complete Form DS-11 (do NOT sign)
3. Handle parental consent

Verify birth certificate is acceptable, ensure parental IDs are current, and obtain passport photo from professional service.

Find Acceptance Facility

Types of Facilities: Post offices (most common), public libraries, city/county clerk offices, some AAA locations

Scheduling: Most facilities require appointments. Use the facility locator at travel.state.gov. You can schedule appointments up to 4 weeks in advance.

Attend Your Appointment

What Happens:

1. Agent reviews all documents
2. Agent witnesses signatures on DS-11
3. Agent attaches passport photo
4. You pay execution fee to facility (\$35)
5. You receive receipt with tracking number

Critical Requirements: Your child must be present with no exceptions. All required people must attend. Bring two separate payments.

After Submission

Tracking Your Application: Use receipt number at passportstatus.state.gov. Status may take 1-2 weeks to appear online.

Receiving Your Passport: Processing takes 4-6 weeks after application reaches the center. Factor in mailing time for total of 6-10 weeks from submission to receipt.

Fees and Payment Options

Standard Fees Breakdown

Service	Applica tion Fee	Executi on Fee	Total
Passpo rt Book	\$100	\$35	\$135
Passpo rt Card	\$15	\$35	\$50
Book + Card	\$115	\$35	\$150

Optional Services

Service	Fee	Processing Time
Expedited Service	\$60	2-3 weeks
1-2 Day Delivery	\$21.36	Faster return shipping

Payment Methods

Application Fee (\$100 - Paid to U.S. Department of State):

- Check or money order payable to "U.S. Department of State"
- Credit/debit cards (online applications)

Execution Fee (\$35 - Paid to Acceptance Facility):

- Cash, check, or money order (varies by facility)
- Some facilities accept credit cards
- Call ahead to confirm accepted payment methods

Important: These are two separate payments - do not combine

Note on Credit Card Payments: The Department of State has been testing credit, debit, and cashless payment methods at the Los Angeles, Miami, and New Orleans passport agency locations. Applicants with appointments at these specific sites should confirm their payment options.

Processing Times and Expedited Service



Standard Processing

- **Routine Service:** 4-6 weeks from application reaching processing center
- **Total Time:** 6-10 weeks including mailing time
- **Best For:** Travel planned more than 3-4 months ahead



Expedited Service

- **Processing Time:** 2-3 weeks from receipt
- **Additional Cost:** \$60
- **Total Time:** 4-5 weeks including mailing
- **Best For:** Travel planned 6-10 weeks ahead



Emergency Situations

Life-or-Death Emergencies:

- Emergency travel within 72 hours receives expedited handling
- Same-day service available at passport agencies
- Requires proof of emergency and travel within 3 business days
- Must schedule appointment by calling 1-877-487-2778

Urgent Travel (Within 14 Days):

- Appointment required at passport agency or center
- Proof of international travel required
- Additional fees apply

Common Mistakes to Avoid

When applying for a child's passport, watch out for these frequent issues that can cause delays:

Documentation Errors

- **The most common error is using the wrong form or signing DS-11 prematurely** (major delay)
- **Forgetting photocopies or preparing them incorrectly** causes frequent delays
- **Using photocopies instead of originals** for citizenship proof
- **Expired parental identification** at appointment

Parental Consent Issues

- **Notarized consent form older than 3 months**
- **Missing photocopy of absent parent's ID**
- **Assuming one parent can sign for both** without proper documentation

Photo and Payment Issues

- **Photo rejections happen often due to incorrect background or specifications** (most common rejection reason)
- **Payment mistakes include wrong amounts or combining the two separate fees**
- **Not bringing both payment methods** to appointment

Planning Mistakes

- **Not applying 3-4 months before travel** to account for processing and potential delays
- **Forgetting to bring both payment methods** to appointment
- **Scheduling appointment too close to travel date**
- **Not checking destination country requirements** for passport validity

Special Situations

Name Changes for Children

If your child's name differs from their birth certificate:

- Bring court order documenting legal name change
- Adoption decree (if applicable)
- Amended birth certificate

Children Born Abroad

For children born outside the U.S.:

- Consular Report of Birth Abroad (CRBA) required
- If no CRBA, child may need to apply for Certificate of Citizenship first
- Contact nearest U.S. embassy or consulate for guidance

Military Families

Deployed Parent:

- Military deployment creates special circumstances for completing consent forms overseas
- Can provide notarized DS-3053 from overseas
- Military legal assistance offices can provide notary services
- Include copy of military orders if helpful for context

Stationed Overseas:

- Apply at U.S. embassy or consulate
- Same requirements apply but may have different processing times

Divorced Parents and Custody Situations

Joint Custody:

- Divorced parents with joint custody need both parents' consent
- Bring divorce decree if it specifies travel permissions
- Both parents must still consent unless court order states otherwise

Sole Legal Custody:

- Parents with sole legal custody can apply alone with proper court documentation
- Court order must specifically grant passport/travel authority
- Death certificate required if other parent is deceased

Cannot Locate Other Parent:

- If you cannot locate the other parent, submit Form DS-5525
- Provide detailed explanation of efforts to contact other parent
- Additional documentation may be requested

After You Receive the Passport

Verify Information

Check immediately upon receipt:

- Child's name spelled correctly
- Birth date accurate
- Passport number recorded
- Photo properly attached
- No damage to passport

Keep It Safe

Storage Tips:

- Store in safe, dry location
- Make photocopies for travel (keep originals separate)
- Consider passport holder for protection
- **Register for Children's Passport Issuance Alert Program (CPIAP):** This free program notifies you if anyone attempts to apply for your child's passport. To enroll, you will need to complete **Form DS-3077**.

Travel Considerations

Six-Month Rule:

- Many countries require 6 months validity remaining
- Check destination requirements before booking travel
- Renew early if passport expires soon after travel

Passport Renewal at Age 16: A Major Milestone

Exciting Changes at 16

Your teen's 16th birthday marks a significant passport milestone that brings several advantages:

- Upgrade to a full 10-year adult passport (versus 5 years for children)
- Freedom to renew by mail for all future renewals (saving time and hassle)
- Independent application process with reduced parental requirements
- Perfect timing to establish travel identity before college/career

This transition represents an important step toward travel independence for your teenager!

Navigating the Adult Passport Process

What you'll need for their first adult passport:

- Current child passport (bring even if expired)
- Completed Form DS-11 (not the renewal form)
- Fresh passport photo meeting adult standards
- Government-issued ID (driver's license ideal)
- Only one parent needs to sign (a major simplification)

Pro tip: Schedule the appointment within 2-3 months of their 16th birthday to maximize the validity period of their new passport.



Important Contacts and Resources



U.S. Department of State

- Website: travel.state.gov
- Passport Information: 1-877-487-2778
- Hours: Monday-Friday, 8 AM to 10 PM ET



Emergency Contacts

Life-or-Death Emergencies:

- Call 1-877-487-2778
- Press 0 for immediate assistance
- Have proof of emergency ready



National Passport Information Center

- Automated system: 1-877-487-2778
- TDD/TTY: 1-888-874-7793
- Customer service available 24/7



Overseas Emergencies

- Contact nearest U.S. embassy or consulate
- [Embassy.gov](https://embassy.gov) for worldwide locations
- 24-hour emergency services available

[Visit Travel.State.Gov](https://travel.state.gov)

[Check Passport Status](#)

Action Checklist

3-4 Months Before Travel

- Gather all required documents
- Take passport photo at professional service
- Complete Form DS-11 (do not sign)
- Schedule appointment at acceptance facility
- Arrange for second parent or notarized consent

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Week Before Appointment

- Confirm appointment time and location
- Verify payment methods accepted
- Double-check document requirements
- Plan for 30-45 minutes at facility
- Ensure all required people will attend

At Your Appointment

- Bring all original documents and photocopies
- Bring both payment methods
- Let agent witness signatures on DS-11
- Keep receipt with tracking number safe
- Ask about processing time expectations

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After Submission

- Track application status online
- Keep detailed records including photocopies of all documents and application number
- Watch for requests for additional information
- Plan for separate arrival of passport and documents
- Verify passport information when received
- Always verify current information on travel.state.gov
- Store passport safely for future travel

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I expedite my child's passport application?

Yes, expedited service costs an additional \$60 and reduces processing time to 2-3 weeks.

What if my child's other parent lives in another state?

The absent parent can complete a notarized DS-3053 consent form in their state and mail it to you.

Can grandparents or other relatives apply for a child's passport?

Only if they have legal custody and can provide court documentation proving their authority.

What if I need to travel urgently with my child?

Contact 1-877-487-2778 to schedule an appointment at a passport agency for life-or-death emergencies or travel within 14 days.

Do I need a passport for my baby?

Yes, all children, including infants, need their own passport for international travel.

This guide is designed to complement GovClarity's children's passport video content. For the most current information, always verify details at travel.state.gov. GovClarity is not a government agency but aims to simplify government procedures for your confidence.

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