

Child Support Estimators

Estimator	Description	Used by*
Betson-Rothbarth	A “marginal cost” estimator that uses the level of excess income available to people after necessary expenditures are made as the equivalency measure. “Excess income” is measured as expenditures on luxuries (alcohol, tobacco, sweets, entertainment) and savings. This estimator is criticized in relevant literature as understating actual expenditure on children.	Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Maine, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey,, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont, West Virginia.
Espenshade-Engel	A “marginal cost” estimator that uses the percentage of a family’s expenditure on food to its total expenditure as a measure of well-being. Families with the same “food share” expenditure are deemed equally well-off. This estimator is criticized in literature as tending to over-state child rearing expenditure.	Alabama, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Rhode Island, Virginia, Washington
U.S. Department of Agriculture	Using data from the 1990-1992 Consumer Expenditure Survey several different components are estimated and added together. Cost items such as housing are estimated on a per capita basis, food costs use the food budget shares from the USDA food plans, health care expense shares are taken from the National Medical Expenditure survey.	Although the estimates from this report are not used as the primary estimator in any guidelines at this time they are generally considered and reviewed along with other data when a state reviews its guidelines. http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/ExpendituresonChildrenbyFamilies.htm

*Although the majority of states use one of the estimators described here all states add temper those results with additional considerations such as state income and taxation considerations and poverty guidelines. Some states have developed guidelines using other data, but the methodology is not widely published. Those guidelines generally represent early efforts to develop child support guidelines which were not widely copied.