



CHANGING A CHILD'S NAME

The law of Northern Ireland allows anyone born or legally adopted in Northern Ireland to change their own name. The change is made by recording a notation on the birth entry therefore the birth certificate will show the original name and the recorded change.

There are a variety of name change procedures to comply with the law, however, in respect of changing a child's name.

For a child under the age of 2, if the child's name has been changed by baptism, a Certificate of Baptismal Name should be completed and signed by the person who performed the ceremony of baptism or who has custody of the register in which the baptism is recorded. If the child's name has been changed other than by baptism, a Certificate of Non-Baptismal Name Change should be signed by the Qualified Applicant(s). These are outlined below. Only one change of forename(s) may be made up to the age of two and any application must be made before the child's second birthday.

For a child over the age of 2, but under the age of 18, the application to change a name must be made by the Qualified Applicant(s) and the new name must have been in use for 2 years with appropriate supporting documentary evidence to vouch for same.

The Qualified Applicant(s) for an alteration to a child's name are:

- the father and mother of the child if –
 - they were married to each other at the time of the child's birth; or
 - they were not married to each other at the time of the child's birth but the father has parental responsibility for the child
- the mother of the child if the parents were not married to each other at the time of the child's birth and the father does not have parental responsibility for the child;
- the surviving parent if either of the parents of the child is deceased and the surviving parent has parental responsibility for the child;
- the guardian of the child or any other person who has parental responsibility for the child if –
 - both the parents are deceased; or
 - either of the parents are deceased and the surviving parent does not have parental responsibility for him.

It is imperative to establish who has parental responsibility for a child as anyone with parental responsibility must provide their consent to a change of name for it to happen in the way outlined above.

If someone with parental responsibility does not consent to a name change, an application can be made to court for a 'Specific Issue' Order under Article 8 of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The court will make a decision based on the circumstances of the case, having particular regard to the welfare of the child to which the application refers and by referring to a statutory checklist, which includes, the child's ascertainable wishes and feelings and the likely effect of any change of name.

Should you have any queries about changing a child's name, you should seek legal advice as to the relevant procedure with regard to the individual circumstances of your case and the likely outcome of any such application.