



Kanton Bern
Canton de Berne

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Partnership and Children

Partnership

Parents' Rights and Duties

Being a Parent

Childcare

Family Reunification

Conflicts

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Information for a good start at the new place of residence

Partnership and Children

Partnership

Many different forms of living together are accepted in Switzerland. In order to get married one must be at least 18 years old. Both spouses have equal rights.

Living Together

The forms in which people live together have changed greatly throughout the past centuries in Switzerland. Many unmarried couples live together (Konkubinat | concubinage) and have children together. There is no set division of roles between the partners (male/female). Same-sex partnerships are accepted and legally recognized.

Marriage / Same-Sex Partnership

In Switzerland one must be 18 years old in order to get married. Persons wishing to get married must contact the community of residence's registry office (Regionales Zivilstandsamt). The registry office will initiate the marriage preparation procedure. This involves examining whether the requirements for marriage are met. After the procedure has been completed the wedding must take place within three months. The responsible registry office will offer more detailed information on the procedure and the necessary documents. If one person still lives abroad it is possible to file a request for entry so that he or she can take part in the marriage preparation procedure. Same-sex couples could still register their partnership up until 30 June 2022. A registered partnership includes rights and duties similar to those in a marriage. From 1 July 2022, same-sex couples have also been able to marry. A previously registered same-sex partnership can now be converted into a marriage.

Rights and Duties

Spouses have equal rights and duties by law. Both spouses must marry by choice. If authorities discover that a person has been forced into marriage (Zwangsheirat | Mariage forcé) the marriage may be declared invalid and the person who exercised coercion may be prosecuted. Persons who feel forced into marriage or into staying married should ask for help. You can contact victim support services or the Forced Marriage Center (0800 800 007).



Family Planning

For questions about family planning, pregnancy and sexuality there are special advisory centers in various regions of Canton Bern. The centers offer anonymous and free information on topics such as birth control, sexual difficulties, unwanted pregnancy, or sexually transmitted diseases. They also consult future parents and persons with children.

Divorce

A divorce (Scheidung | divorce) can be requested by both spouses or by one spouse. The regional court is responsible. Marriages that have been performed abroad can also be divorced in accordance with Swiss law. In order to do so one must have lived in Switzerland for at least one year and Switzerland must be one's main place of residence. Divorce may have an impact on residency status or on an ongoing naturalization process. Whether or not non-citizens may remain in Switzerland after the divorce depends on several factors. Special rules apply to victims of domestic violence. A marriage and family counselling center or a legal service will provide further information on divorce.

Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

www.hallo-bern.ch/en/partnership-and-children/partnership

Parents' Rights and Duties

When a child is born a parent must immediately contact the registry office. Married couples gain custody automatically. Unmarried couples must initiate custody procedures.

Notice of Birth

The regional registry office (Regionales Zivilstandsamt) must be notified whenever a child is born. Attention: the place of birth, not the parents' community of residence defines which registry office is responsible. The hospital will send the documents to the responsible registry office when a child is born in hospital. A parent must give notice of birth within three days of a birth outside of hospital (e.g. at home). The responsible registry office provides information regarding the required documents. Children born in Switzerland do not automatically obtain Swiss citizenship.

Acknowledging Paternity

When married couples have a child the husband is automatically registered as the father. Should the husband doubt that he is the father he can dispute paternity in court. Unmarried fathers are not automatically registered as fathers. An unmarried father can acknowledge paternity before or after birth in the registry office of his community of residence (Kindesanerkennung | Reconnaissance d'enfant). Should the father refuse to acknowledge paternity the mother can demand his acknowledgement in court.

Parental Authority

It is a parent's right and duty to care for their child (elterliche Sorge | Autorité parentale). This includes education and financial support. Parents represent their children legally until they have reached the age of 18. Married parents automatically have the same rights and duties in relation to their child. Unmarried fathers must first acknowledge paternity. Afterwards the parents can make a written declaration of joint custody. This can be done with the acknowledgement at the regional registry office or later at the child protection authority (KESB | APEA) at the district's family court. Should unmarried couples be unable to reach a custody agreement the child protection authority will decide. Persons with questions or in need of support may contact a responsible counselling center.



Maintenance

Parents who have separated are both still obligated to care for their child (Unterhalt, Unterhalt|Entretien). For this reason they should reach an agreement on the financial support and care of their child. Child support contributions are to be made by mother and father. If and how much a parent must financially contribute depends on their economic situation and on how involved they are in the supervision of the child. If an agreement cannot be reached a court may be involved. In the event of a legal separation or divorce, child support payment is regulated by a court. If a parent is unwilling to contribute financially the community of residence can help (Inkassohilfe|aide au recouvrement). This includes support in demanding payment and/or payments in advance when necessary (Alimentenbevorschussung|Avance des contributions d'entretien).

Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

www.hallo-bern.ch/en/partnership-and-children/parents-rights-and-duties



Being a Parent

Raising a child is demanding. Many parents ask themselves at various times what is best for their child. Sharing experiences with other parents can be very valuable. In addition, there are various helpful counselling centers.

Meeting Points

There are many opportunities for mothers and fathers to exchange experiences with other parents or to take part in activities with their child. Several opportunities are provided to enable Swiss and foreign parents to get to know each other.

- For small children there are many offers, through which parents come into contact with each other as well.
- Parent-child gymnastics ("MuKi-/VaKi-/EIKi-Turnen") offer games, fun, and exercise for parents and their children. Gymnastics are offered in most communities.
- Family centers (Familienzentrum) host various events for parents and their children.
- You can meet other parents, socialise and use the rooms for breastfeeding, weighing, reading and playing in the free meeting places of the Mothers' and Fathers' Counselling Service.
- Libraries have offers for younger and older children and their parents.

Inquiring about the numerous regional opportunities at the communities of residence is always worthwhile.

Parental Education

In Canton Bern parents can take classes on a wide variety of topics. There are classes that specialize in addressing immigrants' needs. For example, there are classes on the Swiss school system. Some classes are offered in foreign languages. One can find information about course offerings on the family portal of the canton, as well as at the schools or the municipality of residence. There are also various classes for preparation and support on the topic of birth.

In the free group counselling sessions offered by the Mothers' and Fathers' Counselling Service, you can discuss current family issues, receive valuable suggestions from experts and make new contacts in your region.



Educational Counselling

Persons with questions regarding children's education can turn to various information centers. All regions have parenting counselling services. On behalf of the canton, they offer free counseling for families with children. Furthermore, the mother and father counseling services in various municipalities offer their help on questions of infant care as well. The parent helpline works with a trained staff that counsels parents on the phone or via email (telephone 0848 35 45 55 (free), www.elternnotruf.ch).

Counselling for mothers and fathers

The Mothers' and Fathers' Counselling Service offers free advice on nutrition, care, development and education for children between the ages of 0 and 5. The counselling takes place in a counselling centre, by telephone or online. Get in touch if you have any language barriers – we will find a solution!

Information on counselling for mothers and fathers in 16 languages

Information and registration: 031 552 16 16

Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

www.hallo-bern.ch/en/partnership-and-children/being-a-parent



Childcare

To enable fathers and mothers to return to work after giving birth, the Canton Bern promotes childcare services. There are various offers, for example day care centers, day parents or day schools. Most of them have to be paid for. However, those who receive childcare vouchers (Betreuungsgutscheine|bons de garde) pay less.

Day-Care Centres

Children are supervised throughout the day at day-care centers. (Kinderkrippen|Kindertagesstätten|garderies). Most offers are for children from three months of age until school age. Some day-care centers do supervise school age children (before and after school and at lunchtime). Waiting lists are long and parents must enroll their children early. Costs vary and many communities help pay for them: they give childcare vouchers to parents. Need must be documented. The day-care centers or the communities have additional information on enrollment and costs.

Playgroups

Many children attend playgroups (Spielgruppe|Groupe de jeu) before they reach school age. In these playgroups children over the age of approximately 3 meet without their parents to play, do crafts, etc. with a trained leader. Playgroup attendance is voluntary. Particularly for children who do not speak German at home the playgroup is a good opportunity to become exposed to the German language. This facilitates entering school. Costs vary and some communities help pay for playgroups. Playgroups are available in many communities. The community of residence will provide further information.

Day Schools / School Lunch

Some schools offer supervision outside of classes. This depends on the number of registrations. Children can, for example, stay at school during lunchtime if their school has a day school program. There they will be given a lunch. After school they can do their homework under supervision. Before school they can eat something, play or read. These programs must be paid for by parents. The costs often depend on parents' income. The child can benefit from the program on one or more days a week. Day school programs are not to be confused with day schools where children must participate in day school 5 days a week.



Day Families

Day families (Tagesfamilien) are families that care for children for a certain amount of time (usually the whole day). This childcare service is popular amongst working parents. There are services that help parents find suitable day families and that will provide information on average costs.

Babysitters / Emergency Situations

In Switzerland young people are often employed as babysitters for evenings or weekends. The Swiss Red Cross (SRK|CRS) Bern keeps a list of babysitting services that work with sitters who have attended a babysitting class. It is common to pay young people for their time. In unpredictable emergency situations the Swiss Red Cross (SRK|CRS) Bern runs an emergency childcare service, for example, when a parent must go to hospital and no other form of childcare is available. The service is not free of charge, but some costs are covered by health insurance.

Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

www.hallo-bern.ch/en/partnership-and-children/childcare



Family Reunification

Family members of persons living in Switzerland can move to Switzerland under certain circumstances. If family or friends want to visit they might have to apply for a visa depending on the country of origin.

Family Reunification

In principle, there is the possibility of family members (direct relatives or spouses) of persons living in Switzerland being able to move here (family reunification, Familiennachzug|Regroupement familial). Which family members can apply depends on the citizenship and residence status of the applicant. Provisionally admitted foreigners (permit F) can also apply under certain circumstances. It is advisable to discuss the requirements for family reunification with an expert at an early stage. Information is available from the Office for Population Services (ABEV|OPOP), the municipality of residence or the integration contact points. Applications for family reunification must be submitted to the cantonal migration service. Residents of the cities of Bern, Biel and Thun submit the application to the municipal residents' office. **Attention:** Family reunification must be applied for within a certain period of time (usually within 1 to 5 years after entry). The period is shorter for children than for adults (e.g. spouse).

Marriage Preparation

Persons living in Switzerland and wishing to marry a partner who lives abroad can apply for an entry permit for marriage preparation (Vorbereitung der Heirat). This permit allows the partner to enter Switzerland before the marriage and to get married here. The Immigration Services informs applicants of necessary documents and procedures.

Entry Visa

For residents of many countries it is not easy to receive an entry visa for Switzerland, for example, in order to visit family. A letter of invitation and/or financial guarantee (Verpflichtungserklärung|Déclaration de prise en charge) issued by the Swiss resident might be necessary. The Swiss representation abroad examines the application and informs applicants of necessary documents and procedures. The Office for Civilian Services (ABEV | OPOP) also provides information.



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Partnership and Children

Conflicts

When there is a conflict in a partnership or family various counselling services can help. Violence in families and between spouses is illegal.

Conflicts in Partnerships

Partners can turn to professional help when there is a conflict in the partnership (Eheberatung|consultation conjugale). Specialized counselling services help to find solutions. Generally, first consultations are free of charge or discounted. Every region has a responsible counselling service.

Conflicts in Families

Families with children may face difficult situations from time to time. These burden both parents and children. Parents are strongly advised to ask for help when they are at a loss for how to proceed. Family counselling services (Familienberatungsstelle|service de consultation familiale) offer personal consultations. The parent helpline has a trained staff that counsels parents with questions regarding child-rearing or who are worried about their children on the phone or via email (telephone 0848 35 45 55, (fixed network tariff) www.elternnotruf.ch). Children and young people can call, email, text, or chat with the child helpline (telephone 147 (free), www.147.ch).

Domestic Violence

Violence in families is an ex officio crime. Persons who perform a violent act are liable to prosecution - independent from the severity of the act. No difference is made between violence directed at the spouse and violence directed at children. Authorities must pursue domestic violence whether reported or not. Victims of violence can turn to free and confidential support services. Special housing (Frauenhaus / Väterhaus|Maison d'accueil) is available for women or men and their children who need temporary protection. The three women's shelters (region Bern, Biel and Thun) can be contacted 24 hours a day (Hotline AppElle!: 031 533 03 03). The counselors help in emergency situations with confidential and free advice. They arrange protection and shelter. Children and young people can contact the child helpline (Kindernotruf) (telephone 147 (free), www.147.ch). Persons who feel threatened by a family member should call the police (telephone 117). The police can order a person who has performed a violent act, or is threatening to do so, to stay away from an apartment or house for an extended time.



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