



IN HONOR OF FATHERS

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

FATHER'S DAY IS AN OCCASION when children celebrate and honor dads for their hard work and unconditional love. On June 17, children all over Texas will thank their fathers in some special way.

This Father's Day, the employees of the Division for Families and Children extend sincere thanks to all fathers for giving their children the love and support only a dad can provide. You are the unsung heroes in your children's lives.

Over the last several years, a steadily growing emphasis on fatherhood has revealed the positive impact of engaged, caring fathers. Research about a father's influence has confirmed what so many of us know to be true – fathers really do make a difference. Children with dads who actively participate in their lives perform better in school, exude greater self-confidence, typically exercise more self-control, and are less likely to engage in risky behaviors as teens.

The Texas Child Support program collected a record \$2 billion in child support last year – and most of the money came from fathers. But children need more than mere money to grow healthy and strong; children thrive on the security and emotional support they receive from loving parents.

Over the last several years, the Division for Families and Children has demonstrated its commitment to fathers by recognizing the important and irreplaceable role they play in their children's lives. Several notable resources that serve fathers include:

The Paternity Opportunity Program gives unmarried fathers the opportunity to acknowledge their children's paternity at the time of birth. The OAG trains hospital staff and midwives to educate parents on the importance of signing an Acknowledgement of Paternity so that the child will have a legal father right from the start. Last year, POP gave more than 100,000 Texas children a good start in life by helping their fathers establish legal paternity.

Maps for New Dads: Handbook for Expectant and New Fathers is a new publication designed to help expecting dads transition into fatherhood. Maps covers everything from what to expect on a prenatal visit to making homes "baby safe" – all in a manner designed to reinforce the special role fathers play. Additional resources developed by the OAG include "A Dad" posters, *Parenting Two-gether Handbook for New Parents*, and the *For Our Children* DVD.

The NCP Choices Project is a collaborative effort between the Office of the Attorney General, the Texas Workforce Commission, and local workforce development boards that assists non custodial parents in Galveston, Brazoria, Hidalgo, El Paso, Tarrant and Bexar counties with workforce services. Parents who are behind on their child support are directed into the program and held accountable for compliance with the job search, job training, and employment requirements for participation.

Access and Visitation programs help parents who do not have custody of their children develop and maintain meaningful relationships with their kids. This year, the Office of the Attorney General awarded 12 federally funded grants to nonprofit organizations and local county governments that will help never-married, divorced or separated parents work together throughout the parenting process. The OAG also funds a toll-free assistance hotline and provides a Web-based directory of services available in Texas communities.

The Parenting and Paternity Awareness (p.a.p.a.) curriculum teaches middle and high school students about the rights, responsibilities, and realities of parenting. It emphasizes the importance of a father and mother both being engaged in their child's life. Students are encouraged to postpone becoming a parent until they are older and in a stable, healthy relationship.

The **No Kidding** program trains Austin and El Paso teen fathers and mothers as peer educators who teach their fellow students about the difficulties of parenthood. These young teachers discuss hard life lessons and the challenges of teen parenting. They encourage teens to postpone becoming a parent until they are older. No Kidding peer educators emphasize the important role played by fathers and mothers who ensure their children grow up strong and healthy.

POINTS TO REMEMBER



THE OAG FATHERHOOD PROGRAM

The Office of the Attorney General provides help to fathers seeking to become more financially and emotionally involved in their children's lives.

The OAG Division for Families and Children helps fathers with:

- child support services
- employer and job training referrals
- establishing paternity for their child
- education about their rights and responsibilities
- information on how to build healthy relationships with their children and the mothers of their children

Call **1-800-252-8014** or visit the Attorney General's Web site at **www.oag.state.tx.us** to find out more.



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