



BUILDING STRONG FAMILIES TO BUILD A STRONGER TEXAS

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

TEXAS CHILDREN ARE THE FUTURE OF THIS STATE. When Texas children and families are strong, Texas is strong. The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) is committed to making sure Texas children have the support and resources they need to lead happy and healthy lives.

To build on the strong foundation created by the Child Support Division and a record-breaking \$2.6 billion was collected last year, the Attorney General's Office oversees family-centered child support programs that work to strengthen families, encourage responsible fatherhood, and promote increased parental cooperation and involvement with children. Studies have found that parents without custody who stay involved with their children are more likely to make regular child support payments.

By building partnerships with federal, state and community-based organizations, the OAG helps strengthen families and reduce the need for child support. The Attorney General's Office encourages strong family formation, responsible parent-hood and parental involvement through initiatives including:

The Access and Visitation program promotes noncustodial parents' access to and visitation with their children, when appropriate, through a variety of shared parenting projects. Awarding grant funding to local organizations is one way the Attorney General's Office can help children whose parents are engaged in

custody or visitation disputes, since federal funding to run the child support program cannot be used to handle these issues. The services provided under this grant include co-parenting education, alternative dispute resolution, development of parenting plans, supervised visitation and visitation enforcement.

The Access and Visitation Hotline is the only service of its kind in the nation that provides parents with free phone access to attorneys who offer legal information and assistance related to child custody and visitation issues, as well as paternity and child support information. Hotline attorneys do not represent parents. Rather, they provide tools and guidance and answer parents' questions. The statewide toll-free number, **(866) 292-4636**, is answered in English and Spanish, Monday – Friday from 1 to 7 p.m. The Hotline has a companion Web site, www.txaccess.org, where parents can download sample materials and tools for assistance with child access issues.

The Parenting and Paternity Awareness (p.a.p.a.) program is an innovative educational curriculum designed for secondary school students and young adults that deals with the "rights, responsibilities and realities of parenting." Key themes in the curriculum focus on the importance of father involvement, the value of paternity establishment, the legal realities of child support, the financial and emotional challenges of single parenting,

the benefits of both parents being involved in a child's life, healthy relationship skills and relationship violence prevention.

The Noncustodial Parent (NCP) Choices project aims to increase child support collections by increasing employment and training services for NCPs, and tightening sanctions for non-cooperation with these services. A judicial order requires un- or under-employed NCPs currently not paying child support to participate in employment services with strict sanctions for non-compliance, which could include jail time. Local workforce development boards provide intensive employment services designed to meet the needs of NCPs and facilitate their entry into stable employment. The project is a collaboration between the OAG, the Texas Workforce Commission and child support judges.

The No Kidding: Straight Talk From Teen Parents project trains and equips young parents to deliver educational curriculum on the realities of being a young parent to students in middle and high school. No Kidding educators use their experiences as teen/young parents to deliver a memorable message about paternity establishment, father involvement, the challenges of parenting and the benefits of postponing parenthood until economically stable and in a marital relationship. The program is implemented through local collaborations of community-based organizations, school districts and the OAG.

POINTS TO REMEMBER



WHEN TEXAS FAMILIES ARE STRONG, TEXAS IS STRONG

The Attorney General's Office strives to provide emotional and financial stability to Texas children and families through initiatives including:

- Access and Visitation programs
- Parenting and Paternity Awareness (p.a.p.a.) program
- Noncustodial Parent Choices program
- No Kidding: Straight Talk From Teen Parents

For more information on these programs, or to apply for child support services, call (800) 252-8014 or visit the Attorney General's Web site, www.texasattorneygeneral.gov.

Information on this and other topics is available on the Attorney General's Web site at www.texasattorneygeneral.gov.



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