

Thanks, Dad



By Greg Abbott
Attorney General of Texas

When June 20 arrives, my daughter Audrey no doubt will thank me in some special way for being her dad. Like other fathers, I work hard to be a good dad because I love her,

and I would do it even if she didn't express her appreciation. Still, it's nice to hear a heartfelt "thank you" now and then. So this Father's Day, I and the employees in the OAG Division for Families and Children extend our sincere thanks to all fathers for giving your 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 there has been a steadily growing emphasis on the positive impact of engaged, caring fathers. New 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, are more self-confident, are more likely to exercise self-control, and less likely to engage in risky behaviors as teens.

Many people think the Office of Attorney General is only interested in fathers for the financial support they provide. It is true our Child Support program collected a record \$1.5 billion in child support last year, and most of the money came from fathers. But a father's contribution to his child's well-being involves much more than money. Children deserve the security that

comes from knowing fathers care enough to provide emotional as well as financial support.

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

- **Project Bootstrap** targets young fathers in Austin, Houston, Laredo and San Angelo, by providing job training and support services to help them get and keep jobs. Fathers in this project also receive family counseling and relationship mediation that strengthens ties to their children.
- **Family Reintegration** programs help fathers re-connect with their children after incarceration. The programs focus on former and soon-to-be released state jail detainees from Houston and El Paso who need assistance in finding gainful employment and resuming parenting duties, including the regular payment of child support.
- **Texas Fragile Families Initiative** is a nationally recognized program that receives support from my office to help young, low-income fathers become more involved in their children's lives. Six programs in cities throughout Texas provide employment assistance, family counseling, fatherhood development activities, and parenting instruction for fathers aged 16-25.
- **The Parenting and Paternity Awareness (p.a.p.a.) curriculum** teaches middle and high school students about the realities of parenting and the importance of both mothers and fathers in

raising healthy children. Students are encouraged to postpone becoming a parent until they are older and in a healthy marriage relationship. We also have launched a pilot program in Austin in which teen parents discuss the challenges of parenthood with their peers.

- **The Paternity Opportunity Program** is an extremely successful undertaking by my office that gives unmarried fathers the opportunity to acknowledge their children's paternity at the time of birth. We train hospitals and birthing centers to educate unmarried parents about the paternity establishment process. Last year, approximately 90,000 Texas fathers voluntarily acknowledged paternity as a result of POP.
- **The Employment Partnership Project** in Tarrant County is an innovative, proactive strategy to help Tarrant County fathers meet the challenges they face in finding jobs and paying child support. Unemployed or under-employed fathers in the program receive help from mentors who ensure they receive the services necessary to maintain stable employment. Dads also have access to a voluntary course that teaches them practical skills for building healthy relationships with their children and the mothers of their children.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

OAG FATHERHOOD INITIATIVES

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

The OAG helps fathers with:

- child support services
- job training and employer 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 information on this and other topics.



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

GREG ABBOTT

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