

Thanks, Dad



On June 19, dads all over Texas will celebrate Father's Day with their children. I will spend the day celebrating fatherhood with my daughter,

Audrey, who no doubt will thank me for being her dad. There is nothing better than receiving thanks from those you love for a job well done.

Like other fathers, I strive to be a good dad and provide my daughter with the financial and emotional support she needs. Good fathering is hard work, but the benefits to our children are endless.

This Father's Day, the employees of the Division for Families and Children and I 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 Attorney

General's office is only interested in fathers for the financial support they provide. It is true our Child Support program collected a record \$1.6 billion in child support last year, and most of the money came from fathers. However, 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:

The Family Reintegration program helps fathers reconnect with their children after incarceration. The program focuses on former and soon-to-be released state jail detainees who need assistance in finding gainful employment and resuming parenting duties, including the regular payment of child support.

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, POP gave more than 92,000 Texas children a good start in life by helping their fathers establish legal paternity.

The Choices Project is a collaborative effort between my office and the Texas Workforce Commission that targets

noncustodial parents in Galveston, Brazoria, Hidalgo, El Paso and Bexar counties. Parents who are behind on their child support are given three choices; enroll in the program, make a payment, or go to jail. Parents who chose to enroll in the program are provided with job training and support services to help them get and keep jobs.

Access and Visitation programs help parents without custody develop and maintain meaningful relationships with their children. This year, my office awarded federally funded grants to 11 private nonprofit organizations that will help never married, divorced or separated parents work together to parent their children.

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.

The No Kidding program is an innovative strategy for educating Austin teens about the responsibilities of teen parenting. Teen parents from local high schools discuss the challenges of parenthood with their peers and assist teachers in delivering the p.a.p.a. program. No Kidding gives young people information they need to make informed decisions about their future.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

OAG Fatherhood Initiatives

The Office of 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 information on this and other topics.



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