

Preparing Teens for Responsible Parenting



By Greg Abbott
Attorney General of Texas

All of us as caring adults have an obligation to equip young people with information they need to make informed decisions about their future.

Part of the preparation for adulthood involves helping youth – and the next generation of Texas parents – understand the responsibilities and rewards of raising their own families.

That is why the Child Support Division of my office recently unveiled a new Parenting and Paternity Awareness Program called **P.A.P.A.** that promotes responsible parenting and teaches teenagers skills for building strong, stable families. **P.A.P.A.** is a prevention and preparation tool for non-parenting teens, and a parenting education tool for teens with children.

Targeting students in grades 6-12, **P.A.P.A.** not only deals with the legal rights and financial obligations that come with parenthood, but educates young people about the realities of parenting. The program gives those who already are parents solid information about child support. The objec-

tive is to make students aware that parenthood is a commitment that will last at least 18 years.

P.A.P.A. teaches teens about the rights and responsibilities of parenthood. They also learn about the realities of parenting. **P.A.P.A.** stresses that young people need to have attained a certain level of maturity and independence before they become parents.

The curriculum encourages young people to evaluate their own readiness for parenthood and plan ahead to make realistic decisions based on a solid understanding of the legal and practical consequences of becoming a parent.

Not meant to preach or lecture young people, **P.A.P.A.**'s 10 interactive sessions engage students in a variety of learning experiences centered around their ideas and expectations for parenthood. In addition to the teacher's guidebook and student workbook, **P.A.P.A.** includes a new companion video that features interviews with teen parents about the realities of their lives.

Parents in the video tell their own stories in their own words about the challenges of raising children while still in their teens. In the concluding segment, they voluntarily deliver their own message: being a parent is great,

but when you're just a kid yourself, it's tough. Every one of them says: "You have all the time in the world. Finish school. Think it through. Wait until you are ready."

P.A.P.A. is designed for the school setting but is easily adaptable to Head Start and other community-based programs that serve young people.

I encourage educators across the state to consider delivering this curriculum when school resumes in the fall. By making **P.A.P.A.** available in classrooms, students will come to realize that parenting is not just another casual event in their lives. We all benefit when teenagers have the information they need to make informed decisions about their future.

Contact the Attorney General's Child Support Division at 512-460-6124 to obtain general information about **P.A.P.A.**, or to schedule training that is required to deliver the curriculum.

POINTS TO REMEMBER RESPONSIBLE PARENTING

The AG's Parenting and Paternity Awareness curriculum (P.A.P.A.) teaches teens:

A person who is a biological parent is responsible for supporting his or her child, period. It does not matter whether the parents:

- were married
- intended to become pregnant
- were underage
- are still in school
- have other financial obligations

Being a parent is:

- fun
- exciting
- rewarding
- expensive
- demanding
- difficult

The Office of the Attorney General can:

- locate absent parents
- establish paternity (legal fatherhood)
- establish a court order for child support
- withhold wages
- intercept income tax refunds
- puts delinquent parent in jail

For more information about the P.A.P.A. curriculum, call the Attorney General's Child Support Division at 512-460-6124



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Information on this and other topics is available on the Attorney General's Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us.