

Parental Involvement Means More Than Just Paying Child Support



By **Greg Abbott**
Attorney General of Texas

When parents are involved in their lives, children have a better chance at growing up healthy, happy and well adjusted. Most parents instinctively understand this and do what is needed to provide the foundation for success. However, sometimes a healthy reminder, doesn't hurt. President Bush recently set aside "Family Day" for the nation to engage in activities "to strengthen the relationships between parents and children." In issuing his proclamation, the President noted that parents play a central role in steering their children toward healthy behaviors and clear of harmful ones. Simple activities such as sharing a meal or going to a ball game together provide ideal opportunities for this kind of interaction. While the September 22 observance has passed, parents really can choose any day — ideally, all days — as their own Family Day.

As the one charged with ensuring that Texas children receive the financial support they need from parents, I see every day the need for fathers and mothers to be involved in their kids' lives. This starts with regular child support payments. Children depend

on child support to provide basic needs like food, shelter, health care, and clothing. Research shows that children who receive regular child support reap intangible benefits as well, such as making better grades in school, being more likely to finish high school and attend college, and even having fewer behavior problems at school. Without a doubt, paying child support is one critical way parents can demonstrate their love for their children.

But money is only part of the equation. Too often, children would benefit from more, not less, involvement from the parent who pays their child support.

My office is working across Texas to encourage parental involvement through such programs as the Parenting and Paternity Awareness Program (P.A.P.A.), which teaches middle and high school students about responsible parenting and the skills needed to build strong, stable families. We are partnering with teachers and other groups in many communities to bring P.A.P.A. to students in area school districts.

President Bush noted that children from two-parent families have increased chances for success in life because they are less likely to end up in poverty, become addicted to drugs, suffer abuse, or have a child out of wedlock. I agree with his assessment, and so does social research. In some instances where the safety of mothers and their children is in danger, marriage may not be

suitable. But where appropriate, programs produced by my office -- such as P.A.P.A. -- extol the benefits of getting married before becoming parents. Parental involvement can thrive the most where both parents are present.

I am thankful that most parents faithfully carry out their responsibilities to their children, doing such things as paying court-ordered child support each month. All children deserve the security that comes from knowing their parents care enough to make regular child support payments. For those parents who need extra encouragement, I have several enforcement measures at my disposal that can remind them of their duty to pay.

My hope, however, is that more parents will truly understand just how necessary they are to the success of their children. I look forward to the day when we won't have to have a Family Day to remind us of that.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parents Who Are Involved in Their Kids' Lives:

- Support them financially;
- Help them avoid risky behaviors;
- Point the right way toward adulthood;
- Show them they are loved.

The Attorney General Will Help You:

- Learn many responsibilities of parenthood;
- Locate a non-custodial parent;
- Establish your child's paternity;
- Establish and enforce child support orders;
- Establish and enforce medical support orders;
- Review and adjust child support payments;
- Collect and distribute child support payments.

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

To apply for Child Support Services:
Visit Child Support Interactive at:
www.oag.state.tx.us
Call the 24-hour voice response system
at: (800) 252- 8014



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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.