



IN HONOR OF FATHERS

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

JUNE 18 IS A DAY to celebrate and thank dads for a job well done. Across Texas, from the Panhandle to the Rio Grande Valley, dads will celebrate fatherhood with their children. I will spend the day with my daughter, who will thank me in some special way for being her dad.

Like other fathers, I strive to be a good dad and to provide my daughter with the financial and emotional support she needs. Parenting 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 their 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. 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.

Our Child Support program collected a record \$1.8 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 their

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:

Building Strong and Healthy Families in Texas is designed to increase the number of new, unmarried parents who enter into stable family and marital relationships. The project, which is in Houston and San Angelo, also works to establish legal paternity for the unmarried parents' children and to provide parental responsibilities.

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 hospital staff and midwives to educate parents on signing an Acknowledgement of Paternity so that the child will have a legal father. Last year, POP gave more than 108,000 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, Tarrant and Bexar counties. Parents who are behind

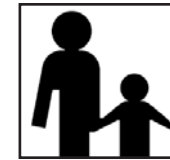
on their child support are given three choices: enroll in the program, make a payment or go to jail. Parents who chose to enroll in the program are provided with job training and support services to help them get and keep jobs.

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 12 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 and El Paso 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 out more.



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT