



PREPARING TEENS FOR RESPONSIBLE PARENTING

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

FOUR OUT OF FIVE TEXAS HIGH SCHOOL students will become a parent at some point in their lives. Parenting is one of the most rewarding and challenging opportunities these Texans will ever experience. Unfortunately, Texas leads the nation with parents who have children before their 18th birthday. One has to ask, "How prepared for the responsibilities of parenting is the next generation of Texas parents?"

As caring adults, we have an obligation to equip young people with information they need to make informed decisions about the future. It makes common sense to provide information to students about the life-changing legal, emotional, and financial realities of becoming a parent – with emphasis on the added consequences of becoming a parent while still a teen. Beyond the obligation, there is the opportunity to help young Texans – and the next generation of parents – understand the responsibilities and rewards of raising a family.

That is why the Attorney General's Office of Family Initiatives developed two programs that promote responsible parenting and teach teenagers skills for building strong, stable families.

p.a.p.a. (Parenting and Paternity Awareness) is an innovative curriculum distributed to educators and community professionals across the

state that teaches young adults about the rights, responsibilities, and realities of parenting.

The curriculum focuses on the importance of father involvement, the value of paternity establishment, the legal realities of child support, the financial and emotional challenges of single parenting, and the benefits of both parents being involved in a child's life.

p.a.p.a. stresses that young people need to attain a certain level of maturity and independence before they become parents. The curriculum encourages teenagers 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 parenthood.

During the last three years, the Attorney General's Office has trained approximately 1,500 teachers, school counselors, nurses, community youth workers, and parent educators in the use of the p.a.p.a. curriculum. Senator Royce West and Representative Joe Deshotel recently filed legislation, Senate Bill 1381 and House Bill 2176 respectively, that would help make this curriculum available to students on a statewide basis.

The **No Kidding: Straight Talk from Teen Parents** program trains

and equips young parents to deliver educational presentations to students in middle and high school about the realities of being a young parent.

No Kidding educators use their experiences as young parents to deliver a memorable message about paternity establishment, father involvement, the responsibilities and challenges of parenting, the importance of financial independence as a parent, and benefits of a marital relationship.

In Austin and El Paso No Kidding operates in collaboration with local school districts, community-based organizations, local foundations, and local workforce development boards. In the spring semester of 2006 alone, more than 2,000 Texas high school students participated in the No Kidding program.

By making p.a.p.a. and No Kidding available in classrooms, students will realize that parenting is not just another casual event in their lives. We have a duty to help young people understand the legal and financial obligations of parenthood. Every-one benefits when teenagers have the information they need to make informed decisions about their future. Contact the Attorney General's Office of Family Initiatives at **512-460-6400** to obtain general information about p.a.p.a. and No Kidding.

POINTS TO REMEMBER



RESPONSIBLE PARENTING

P.A.P.A. AND NO KIDDING| TEACH TEENS ABOUT:

- paternity establishment
- father involvement
- the challenges of parenting
- the benefits of postponing parenthood
- the impact of parental conflict on children

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

For more information about **p.a.p.a.** or **No Kidding**, call the Attorney General's Office of Family Initiatives at **512-460-6400**.

For information on services provided by the Attorney General's Child Support Division, call **1-800-252-8014**.

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



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