



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 and some will do so before their 18th birthday.

To help young Texans make informed decisions about their future and postpone parenthood until economically stable and in a marital relationship, the Texas Attorney General's Child Support Division developed an innovative educational curriculum, called **p.a.p.a. (Parenting and Paternity Awareness)**, for secondary school students and young adults that deals with "rights, responsibilities and realities of parenting."

In 2007, the 80th Legislature passed a state law that requires high school health classes to include the p.a.p.a. curriculum beginning this fall. Since passage of the legislation, the Child Support Division employees have conducted 73 p.a.p.a. trainings, which certified more than 1,800 educators to teach the curriculum. In addition, more than 40 trainings are scheduled through December.

The curriculum, which was originally introduced in 1995, was recently updated to include five new sessions and a video. The p.a.p.a. video features young parents from the **No Kidding: Straight Talk from Teen Parents** program, who have spent the past several years in Austin-area classrooms talking to students about what life is like as a teenage parent.

Their stories provide a sobering peek into the day-to-day impact of having a child — from breaking the news to their parents and missing out on high school events, to the ongoing hopes and dreams they hold tightly

for themselves and their children. These peer educators have allowed their stories to be used in the video that will reach more than 300,000 students in Texas health classes each year.

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, the benefits of both parents being involved in a child's life, healthy relationship skills, and relationship violence prevention.

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.

The p.a.p.a. curriculum - including videos - can be found in the child support section of the Attorney General's Web site at www.texasattorneygeneral.gov. Educators, students and parents can access frequently asked questions, Web resources and quizzes.

The No Kidding: Straight Talk from Teen Parents program developed by the Attorney General's Office also promotes responsible parenting. The 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 2006-2007 school year, more than 10,000 Texas high school students participated in the No Kidding program.

As caring adults, we have an obligation to equip young people with information they need to make informed decisions about the future. It's important 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.

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. Everyone benefits when teenagers have the information they need to make informed decisions about their future. Contact the Attorney General's Family Initiatives section 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 **Family Initiatives section 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.texasattorneygeneral.gov.



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