



IT'S SUMMER TIME!

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

SCHOOL'S OUT, THE CRICKETS ARE CHIRPING, and the days are long and hot. It's officially summer time in Texas.

Kids look forward to summer all year long. Help make it special by creating lasting memories for you and your family. 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.

Take time this summer to connect with your children and create memories with simple activities such as exploring a new park, making homemade ice cream, playing in the sprinkler, having a picnic or barbecue, reading a book, or stargazing.

Employees of the Office of the Attorney General who are charged with ensuring Texas children receive the financial support they need from parents see the benefits of fathers and mothers being 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 child support. That is why the Attorney General's Office encourages strong family formation, responsible parenthood and parental involvement through initiatives including:

The Access and Visitation program promotes noncustodial parents' access to and visitation with their children, when appropriate, through a variety of shared parenting projects. Awarding grant funding to local organizations is one way the Office of the Attorney General can help children whose parents are engaged in custody or visitation disputes, since federal funding to run the child support program cannot be used to handle these issues. The services provided under this grant include co-parenting education, alternative dispute resolution, development of parenting plans, supervised visitation and visitation enforcement.

The Access and Visitation Hotline is the only service of its kind in the nation that provides parents with free phone access to attorneys who offer legal information and assistance related to child custody and visitation issues, as well as paternity and child support information. Hotline attorneys do not represent parents. Rather, they provide tools and guidance,

and answer parents' questions. The statewide toll-free number, (866) 292-4636, is answered in English and Spanish, Monday – Friday from 1 to 7 p.m. The Hotline has a corresponding Web site, www.txaccess.org, where parents can download sample materials and tools for assistance with child access issues.

p.a.p.a. (parenting and paternity awareness) is an innovative educational curriculum designed for secondary school students and young adults that deals with the "rights, responsibilities and realities of parenting." Key themes in the curriculum focus 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.

Thankfully, 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.

Please help make this summer memorable for your kids by paying your child support and being there for them. The Office of the Attorney General hopes you and your family have a fun and safe summer!

POINTS TO REMEMBER



PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parents who are involved in their kids' lives:

- Support them financially
- Help them avoid risky behaviors
- Show them they are loved

The Attorney General's Office can help you:

- Learn the responsibilities of parenthood
- Locate a noncustodial 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

Call (800) 252-8014 or visit the Attorney General's Web site at www.texasattorneygeneral.gov to find out more.



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT