



U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services
Administration for Children
and Families
Office of Family Assistance

www.fatherhood.gov

Responsible Fatherhood State Profile: Florida



Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities

Through its Strengthening Families Initiative, the Florida Department of Children and Families provides funding to community-based organizations that offer relationship skills training, life skills training, healthy marriage education, and counseling services to unmarried couples and to families involved in the child welfare system.ⁱ In addition, federal funding has been provided to community-based organizations in the state that offer premarital education to unmarried couples.ⁱⁱ The state reduces the marriage license fee for couples who take a marriage preparation course prior to marrying.ⁱⁱⁱ

Other Marriage Initiatives

In 2003, Florida established the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives to increase public awareness of issues facing families; develop public policies related to parenting, marriage, and families; develop and manage a marriage and family awareness campaign; and develop a clearinghouse of information on the effects of poverty and violence on families and ways to approach these issues.^{iv} Florida's Strengthening Families Initiative also funds a number of community organizations that offer marriage education, counseling and support groups, and relationship-skills training to already-married couples. Several of these programs use research-based curricula, such as the PAIRS and Loving Couples/Loving Children curricula. Federal funding also has enabled organizations in Florida to develop divorce reduction programs and public awareness campaigns promoting marriage.^v

Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs

Florida's Department of Children and Families provides funding for a number of organizations that offer responsible fatherhood programs around the state. One program, Nurturing Fathers, offers support groups and service referrals, and other programs offer culturally sensitive relationships skills education, career counseling, and responsible fatherhood education courses to unmarried, incarcerated, and/or immigrant fathers.^{vi} In addition, the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives currently funds several programs that aim to increase responsible fatherhood and encourage fathers to develop positive relationships with their children through education, case management, job training, referrals, and legal support.^{vii}

State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood

The Florida Department of Health offers family planning services, including education, medical services, and referrals to help individuals prevent unwanted pregnancies.^{viii} The Teen Pregnancy Prevention and Florida Abstinence Education programs work to prevent teen pregnancy and childbearing by encouraging teenagers to abstain from risky behaviors and from sexual activity.^{ix}

The Family and Medical Leave Act

Florida has a Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which allows both fathers and mothers time off after the birth or adoption of a child, or during an illness, without fear of losing their jobs. Parents in companies with 50 or more employees are entitled to up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave over a one-year period in order to care for a new child, an ill family member, or to recover from their own illness. Furthermore, all public sector employers must provide employees with up to six months of unpaid family and medical leave. The FMLA protects fathers and mothers who have worked with the same organization for at least one year and have worked at least 1,250 hours within the past year. Florida has no state provisions for paid leave.^x

Domestic Violence Services

The Office of Domestic Violence, operating within the Department of Children and Families, serves as a clearinghouse of domestic violence information and coordinates the domestic violence services system in Florida. The state provides funding for batterers' interventions, technical assistance, educational programs, training for law enforcement officers and public officials, and facility improvements. In addition, Florida funds a number of community-based organizations that offer emergency shelters and services, including crisis hotlines, case management, and referrals, to domestic violence victims.^{xi} Florida also has an address confidentiality program, which was established to prevent batterers from locating their former victims.^{xii}

Child Custody Policy

When married couples with children separate voluntarily, both parents have the right to petition the Florida family court system to determine the custody of the children. The state has a presumption or preference for joint custody of children.^{xiii} Some parents may be required to participate in mediation prior to the resolution of a custody dispute.

Paternity Establishment

Paternity establishment ensures a child's right to a range of public benefits, including survivor's insurance, education, health care, and workers' compensation; and establishing paternity gives a child born outside of marriage the same legal rights as a child born to married parents. Florida has an in-hospital paternity acknowledgement program. When paternity is uncontested, parents can establish a child's paternity either in the hospital or by submitting a consenting affidavit. When paternity is contested, parents must go through a judicial process in which the alleged father may have to participate in genetic testing. In Florida, the paternity establishment process may begin at any time up until the child turns 18.^{xiv}

Child Support Assistance

Florida operates a child support program through its Department of Revenue; the program aims to improve the well-being of children by ensuring that noncustodial parents pay child support for their children. The Child Support Enforcement Program helps locate missing parents; establish paternity for children born outside of marriage; establish and enforce child support orders; and modify existing support orders.^{xv} Noncustodial parents with low monthly income receive individualized child support awards through the Florida court system.^{xvi}

Child Support Enforcement

In Florida, unpaid child support can be collected from a noncustodial parent's wages, tax refunds, lottery winnings, and unemployment and workers' compensation benefits. The Child Support Enforcement Program also can place liens on the parent's property and bank accounts, report the parent's arrears to credit bureaus, and issue arrest warrants for nonpayment of child support.^{xvii} When a noncustodial parent is more than 15 days delinquent in his or her child support payment, the Child Support Enforcement Program may restrict the

parent's driver's license and vehicle registration. When other remedies have proven ineffective in inducing payment, Florida may restrict professional and business licenses and teacher certificates.^{xviii}

Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits

Through the Work and Gain Economic Self-Sufficiency (WAGES) program, Florida offers cash assistance to low-income families. In Florida, two-parent families are eligible to receive benefits on the same basis as single-parent families. A 48-month lifetime limit exists on receipt of these benefits. Parents receiving financial assistance must participate in work activities immediately upon receipt of benefits; however, postsecondary education and training can fulfill this work requirement.^{xix}

Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers

The state offers parenting programs to noncustodial fathers and to fathers who are incarcerated. Several of these programs are designed to help fathers increase their economic self-sufficiency, find employment, and improve relationships with their children and with the mothers of their children.^{xx}

Job Training and Employment Services

Florida has a network of Regional Workforce Boards and One-Stop Career Centers that offer employment services and training to low-income and unemployed individuals. In addition to offering job-search assistance and training programs, these centers provide clients with transportation, child care, and relocation assistance, as well substance abuse and mental health treatment programs and other critical services.^{xxi}

Incarceration and Reentry

Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

Florida offers parenting education programs to incarcerated fathers, ranging from family days to parenting, marriage enrichment, life-skills, and family relationship classes.^{xxii} In addition, several community-based organizations have received funding from the Florida Department of Children and Families to offer fatherhood courses to incarcerated fathers, support groups to their children, and parenting education to their children's mothers.^{xxiii}

Resources

- **Florida Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives.** This Web site provides information about the Commission and on programs and information related to marriage and families; available at <http://floridafamilies.org/>
- **Strengthening Families Initiative.** This Web site offers a general overview of the Strengthening Families Initiative and the programs and services provided through the Initiative; available at <http://www.myfloridafamilies.com>

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