



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

www.fatherhood.gov

Responsible Fatherhood State Profile: Delaware



Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities

Delaware does not directly use state funds for marriage promotion programs. However, pilot marriage programs funded by the federal government and nongovernmental sponsors are available in the state. For example, as a result of federal legislation allocating funding for healthy marriage activities, a number of organizations in Delaware have received funds to provide premarital education, marriage skills training, counseling, and other services to engaged couples and to couples who are interested in marriage.ⁱ

Other Marriage Initiatives

One program recently funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Collaborative Fatherhood Program of Wilmington, offers marriage enhancement, skills training, counseling, and other services to married couples hoping to strengthen their relationships.ⁱⁱ

Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs

The University of Delaware offers a certification program for individuals working in the community with fathers. This program helps community workers design activities that are appealing to fathers and that address fathering responsibilities, violence prevention, motivation, and relationship building.ⁱⁱⁱ

State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood

Delaware uses federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding to support a number of pregnancy prevention initiatives and programs aimed at helping teenagers make responsible decisions. For example, the Alliance on Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention is a media and community outreach campaign intended to increase parent-child communication about pregnancy prevention. Additionally, the state has established the Wise Guys initiative, which works with teenage males to promote character development, responsibility, and adolescent pregnancy prevention.^{iv}

The Family and Medical Leave Act

Delaware 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 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. All public sector employers must also provide up to six weeks of leave for the adoption of a child. 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. Paid sick leave may also be used as family leave following the birth or adoption of a child.^v

Domestic Violence Services

The state established the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council in 1993 to help state officials and nongovernmental service providers coordinate domestic violence services, improve the state system's response to domestic violence, and establish standards of response to incidents of domestic violence. The council also provides domestic violence training to health care professionals, law enforcement officers, school officials, clergy members, and court officers.^{vi} In addition, a number of community-based programs provide services to victims of domestic violence. These services include crisis hotlines, service referrals, housing assistance, educational services, legal support and advocacy, counseling, and support groups.^{vii}

Child Custody Policy

Upon a couple's voluntary separation, either or both parents may petition the Family Court for custody of children. When a petition for custody is filed in Delaware, both parents must take a parenting education class. Except in cases of domestic violence, parents are first referred to mediation in an attempt to establish a custody order. If mediation does not result in a satisfactory custody arrangement, the case is referred to a judge for a full hearing.^{viii}

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. Delaware 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 Voluntary Acknowledgement of Paternity form. When paternity is contested, parents must go through a judicial process in which the alleged father may have to participate in genetic testing. In Delaware, paternity may be established at any time prior to the child's 18th birthday.^{ix}

Child Support Assistance

Delaware operates its Division of Child Support Enforcement through the state's Department of Health and Social Services. This division aims to ensure that both parents remain financially obligated to and responsible for their children after the parents' relationship ends. The Division of Child Support Enforcement offers opportunities for fathers and their children to take part in shared activities, such as the Fatherhood Celebration Basketball Tournament, with the goal of helping fathers understand their importance and how to be involved in the lives of their children.^x

Child Support Enforcement

Delaware can collect owed child support from the noncustodial parent's federal or state tax refund, paycheck, lottery winnings, or unemployment benefits, and may also place liens on the parent's property and/or bank accounts. When arrears reach \$1,000, or when the noncustodial parent is 30 or more days delinquent in paying support, the state may restrict the parent's driver's, professional, business, or recreational license and report the parent's missed payments to credit bureaus. As arrears continue to rise, the state may deny or revoke the nonpaying parent's passport.^{xi}

Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits

Delaware offers welfare benefits to two-parent families on the same basis as to single-parent families. The state imposes a lifetime limit of 36 months on the receipt of benefits. Parents in two-parent families receiving financial assistance must participate in work activities

immediately upon receiving benefits; parents in one-parent families must begin participating in work activities 24 months after receiving benefits. Education and training, however, can fulfill this work requirement.^{xii}

Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers

Delaware's Department of Child Support Enforcement offers opportunities for fathers to participate in activities with their children as a way to make fathers and their communities aware of services available to low-income, noncustodial fathers. In addition, pre-release and reentry programs offered by the Department of Correction seek to provide fathers with a greater understanding of child development and parenting techniques.^{xiii}

Job Training and Employment Services

Fathers in families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits are eligible for a range of employment services, including case management, training, job-search assistance, vocational training, job-skills training, and educational services.^{xiv}

Incarceration and Reentry

Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

The Delaware Department of Correction offers a range of programs, including a parenting program, to incarcerated individuals. This program is part of a larger group of pre-release services. In addition, the Young Criminal Offenders Program works with incarcerated fathers between the ages of 15 and 18 to help them understand their responsibilities as fathers and improve their parenting skills.^{xv}

Resources

- **Domestic Violence Coordinating Council.** This Web site provides information about the legislation establishing the Council, its activities, and victim and offender services available in Delaware; available at <http://dvcc.delaware.gov/>

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