



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



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Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs

In 2002, the DC Fatherhood Initiative was established by the D.C. Department of Human Services and the mayor of Washington, D.C., and is designed to help low-income and unemployed fathers become and stay involved with their children's lives. Among other services, the DC Fatherhood Initiative provides life skills education, employment training, job training, and wrap-around services to fathers aged 14 or older.ⁱ In 2006, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provided additional funding to the D.C. Department of Human Services to expand the DC Fatherhood Initiative to work with community and faith-based organizations, to offer additional support services, and to work with a broader range of low-income and at-risk fathers.ⁱⁱ

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, also provided funding to three community programs in the District of Columbia in 2006. The Latin American Youth Center works adolescent and young adult men to offer parenting skills, life skills, educational and work skills, group counseling, and other services and skills. Additionally, the National Organization of Concerned Black Men, Inc. works with low-income families to improve parenting skills, strengthen relationships, and improve child well-being. The third program, Healthy Families/Thriving Communities Collaborative Council, works to increase father involvement in their children's schooling, provide fathers with service referrals, provide employment training and assistance, and train community organizations to work with fathers.ⁱⁱⁱ

State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood

Washington, D.C., offers a number of programs intended to reduce adolescent pregnancy and childbearing. For example, New Heights uses Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds to help teen parents complete high school, improve parenting skills, and find job training and post-secondary education. The Department of Human Services also provides pregnancy prevention grants to community organizations. These organizations target at-risk adolescents between the ages of 11 and 14 and offer peer mentoring, education about responsible behavior, abstinence education, and relationship education.^{iv}

The Family and Medical Leave Act

Washington, D.C., requires all employers to offer up to 16 weeks of unpaid leave in any 24-month period. This leave can be used upon the birth or adoption of a child, to recover from an illness, or to care for an ill family member, and protects the jobs of parents who have worked with the same organization for at least one year and have worked at least 1,250 hours within the past year. In addition, Washington, D.C. allows employees to use paid sick, vacation, or personal leave to be used to care for family members or upon the birth or adoption of a child.^v

Domestic Violence Services

The DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence coordinates outreach and educational activities, tracks legislative and judicial activity related to domestic violence, advocates for domestic violence funding, provides technical assistance to domestic violence programs, and provides training to policy makers and community organizations.^{vi} A number of community organizations in Washington, D.C. and the surrounding metropolitan area offer services to domestic violence victims, including emergency and transitional housing, legal resources and advocacy, case management, support services, service referrals, and counseling.^{vii} The D.C. Department of

Take Time to Be a Dad Today

Human Services, in collaboration with the DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence, operates the Family Violence Prevention Program, which is designed to provide shelter and support services to victims, information and education to the public, and outreach services to victims.^{viii}

Child Custody Policy

In cases of divorce or separation, child custody decisions are made in the best interest of the child. Factors included in this determination include the child's opinion; the parents' opinions; the relationship between the child and his/her parents and siblings; the child's adjustment to home, school, and community; the mental and physical health of the child and parents; evidence of domestic violence; the capacity of the parents to co-parent; the willingness of parents to share custody; each parent's prior role in the child's life; demands of parental employment; age and number of children; the benefit to the parents; the effect on public assistance benefits; the distance between the parents' homes; and each parent's ability to support joint custody. The Court may also order each parent to submit a detailed parenting plan and participate in parenting education classes prior to ruling on custody.^{ix}

Paternity Establishment

Establishing paternity for a child born outside of marriage allows the father's name to be shown on the birth certificate; provides the child with rights to health care, Social Security, inheritance, and military benefits; and helps secure financial support for the child. In Washington, D.C., acknowledgement of paternity can be voluntarily established by completing a form. If paternity is disputed, however, the mother, alleged father, and minor child must submit to DNA/genetic testing.^x

Child Support Assistance

In Washington, D.C., child support services are provided through the Child Support Services Division (CSSD) of the Office of the Attorney General. The CSSD helps locate nonresident parents; determine and establish paternity; establish child and medical support orders; enforce child and medical support orders; review and modify child support orders; and collect and disburse child and spousal support payments.^{xi}

Child Support Enforcement

In order to collect unpaid child support, the Child Support Services Division (CSSD) may take a number of actions against noncustodial parents. The CSSD may withhold money from the parent's paycheck; suspend the parent's driver's license; intercept lottery winnings; intercept state or federal tax refunds; suspend the parent's passport; or have the parent be held in civil or criminal contempt of court.^{xii}

Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities

Washington, D.C. does not currently fund any marriage preparation activities.

Other Marriage Initiatives

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has provided funding for a number of healthy marriage programs in Washington, D.C. Best Friends Foundation, works with high school students to provide education on the value of marriage, relationship skills, budgeting, and marriage mentoring in order to increase the number of teens who intend to get married and lower the rate of unwed pregnancy. Granato Counseling Services, Inc., provides marriage enhancement and marriage skills training to low-income married couples.^{xiii} Washington, D.C.'s Department of Human Services currently funds the Strong Families Initiative, which serves families that are at high risk of family separation. Although the program is not explicitly aimed at promoting marriage, it focuses on providing comprehensive services to strengthen family relationships and prevent family dissolution.^{xiv} In addition, the East Capitol Center for Change and the East River Strengthening Collaborative administer the Healthy Marriages - Strong Families

Initiative, which coordinates a public education campaign regarding healthy relationships, hosts an annual “Celebrate Black Marriage Day” event, and offers workshops on marriage enrichment and parenting education.^{xv}

Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers’ Economic Stability

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits

Public assistance benefits are available to low-income families in Washington, D.C., through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. TANF recipients must participate in work activities after receiving benefits for 24 months. If heads of households participate in work and self-sufficiency activities, however, they can continue to receive benefits beyond the 60-month lifetime limit for state TANF benefits.^{xvi}

Upon applying for TANF benefits, individuals are referred to participate in a Job Club, a six-week work readiness program. Eligible work activities include subsidized and unsubsidized employment, job training, and work experience.^{xvii} Additional activities available to qualifying TANF recipients include the Paving Access to Higher Security (PATHS) program at the University of the District of Columbia; training activities; post-secondary education and scholarships; and adult basic education programs.^{xviii}

TANF applicants are screened for eligibility for diversion assistance, which is intended to respond to short-term, immediate needs in order to prevent an individual from needing to receive long-term public assistance benefits. Eligible expenses for diversion assistance include automobile insurance, rent and utilities, work clothes, and professional licenses and fees.^{xix} If TANF recipients have child support orders in place, up to \$150 of the child support payment is passed through to the family; the remainder is retained by the Washington, D.C., government to reimburse some of the cost of providing public benefits.^{xx}

Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers

The Child Support Services Division of the Office of the Attorney General has joined with the Department of Employment Services to institute the Non-Custodial Parent Employment Program in the District of Columbia. This initiative is aimed at assisting noncustodial parents with finding employment and attaining self-sufficiency so they are better able to financially support their noncustodial children. The program offers a range of employment services to non-resident parents, including in-depth assessments, job training and placement assistance, and career counseling. In addition, employment-related barriers are addressed through referrals to services such as mental health and substance use treatment.^{xxi} Low-income fathers may also receive employment services through a network of Career Centers that operate in Washington, D.C.^{xxii} Additionally, incarcerated fathers may be eligible to participate in life skills education and other programs designed to help them transition successfully back into society.^{xxiii}

Job Training and Employment Services

Under the jurisdiction of the DC Workforce Investment Council, the District of Columbia operates a number of One-Stop Career Centers and a virtual One-Stop Career Center in order to provide job seekers with information and services.^{xxiv} Among other services, core services at these One-Stop Centers include skills assessments, job search and placement assistance, career counseling, information on available training and educational activities, information about support service, screening for public assistance, follow-up services, and information about financial assistance for training and education. Centers may also offer group and individualized counseling, individualized career planning, case management, and pre-vocational services.^{xxv} The Department of Employment Services also operates an apprenticeship program intended to provide workers with on-the-job training and skills development.^{xxvi}

Incarceration and Reentry

Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

The Washington, D.C., Department of Corrections does not provide programs specifically for incarcerated fathers. However, the Department of Corrections offers several programs to those individuals incarcerated in District correctional facilities and to those residing in halfway houses. These programs include life skills education, family planning information, anger management, service referrals, substance abuse treatment, individual and group counseling, and other intervention services.^{xxvii}

Resources

- **Income Maintenance Administration Policy Manual.** This document provides details about the operation of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in Washington, D.C.; available at <http://dhs.dc.gov/dhs/cwp/view,a,1345,Q,604418.asp>

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