



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



NRFC State Profiles: Utah 2009

Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs

A statewide Fatherhood Coordinating Committee is responsible for working with the Utah Head Start program to develop individualized father involvement activities, and several fatherhood initiatives have been offered in local Head Start programs as a result. For example, Davis County Public Schools worked with a fatherhood specialist to develop Fathers Involved in Shaping Head Start Children (F.I.S.H.), which offered fatherhood workshops and literacy activities. Another program was developed by Ogden-Weber Community Action Partnership (CAP), Inc. to provide monthly father-child involvement activities.ⁱ

State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood

Utah's Department of Health has a Reproductive Health Program that offers family planning services to residents, including physical exams, birth control information and services, health education services, and referrals. Services are provided through a statewide network of Community Health Centers and may be offered at reduced cost to low-income residents.ⁱⁱ

The Family and Medical Leave Act

Utah is subject to the federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), which requires employers with 50 or more employees to offer up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to parents upon the birth or adoption of a child, to recover from an illness, or to care for an ill family member. The FMLA 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. Utah has no state provisions for paid leave. The federal FMLA also allows eligible family members to take up to 26 weeks of leave annually to care for a military service member who has been injured in the line of duty.ⁱⁱⁱ

Domestic Violence Services

The Utah Domestic Violence Council (UDVC) was established in 1978 by the Utah Division of Child and Family Services and currently operates as an independent, nonprofit organization. The UDVC receives its funding from state and federal violence prevention grants. The organization is charged with developing and reviewing domestic violence policies and procedures, advocating for legal and legislative action, supporting initiatives to eliminate domestic violence, helping to evaluate domestic violence programs, providing basic domestic violence training for service providers, helping to coordinate between Utah agencies and organizations, and advocating for domestic violence services in the state.^{iv}

The Utah Attorney General's office offers programs to respond to domestic violence in the state. For example, through the CUT IT OUT program, the Attorney General's office partners with the Utah Domestic Violence Council, the Utah Department of Health, and several state and national cosmetology associations to teach salon professionals to recognize and assist clients facing domestic violence.^v The Attorney General's office also operates a program designed to raise teens' awareness of dating violence.^{vi}

Child Custody Policy

Utah does not have a presumption or preference for joint custody. Instead, custody arrangements are made in the best interest of the child.^{vii} Utah has also established minimum visitation thresholds for children whose parents divorce; these thresholds vary by age of child but generally include at least one weekday evening per week, alternating weekends, and some holidays.^{viii} For

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infants and toddlers, the minimum visitation threshold varies between roughly six and 11 hours per week.^{ix}

All divorcing parents are required to participate in divorce orientation and education designed to help parents recognize alternatives to divorce, understand the effects of divorce on children, support their children's well-being, and engage in co-parenting.^x In 1997, the Utah State Legislature created the Expedited Parent-time Enforcement Pilot Program, also known as the Co-Parenting Mediation Program. Parents within the jurisdiction of the Third District Court may be required to participate in this program if a motion alleging visitation problems is filed.^{xi} This program is designed to help parents reach agreements on issues related to parent-child visitation and provides additional services, such as neutral drop-off sites and parenting education classes, designed to increase co-parenting and parent-child contact.^{xii}

Paternity Establishment

Establishing paternity for a child born outside of marriage provides the child and father with the same rights and responsibilities as when a child is born to married parents. Paternity provides the child with rights to financial support, medical information, citizenship, Social Security benefits, inheritance rights, and veteran's benefits. It also provides the father with a number of parental rights, such as the right to know about legal proceedings involving the child. In Utah, paternity can be established in two ways. First, both parents can sign a Voluntary Declaration of Paternity form when paternity is not disputed. This form may be signed at any time after a child's birth; however, filing this form is free only if it is signed in the hospital. Alternatively, the mother, the father, the child, or the state of Utah may file a legal action to establish paternity. In such cases, genetic testing is usually conducted to determine whether a man is the father of a child.^{xiii}

In 2005, the Office of Recovery Services established Paternity Matters in order to provide training and support to those working on the paternity establishment process in hospitals, to provide unwed parents with information about paternity establishment, and to provide training and materials to community groups working with unwed parents.^{xiv}

Child Support Assistance

In Utah, the child support program is administered by the Office of Recovery Services (ORS), part of the Department of Human Services. The ORS is responsible for ensuring that parents are financially responsible for and provide support for their children.^{xv} Services offered through the ORS include locating parents, establishing paternity, establishing and modifying child support orders, enforcing child support and medical insurance orders, and collecting alimony in cases where alimony and child support have both been ordered.^{xvi}

If noncustodial parents have made in-kind support payments, such as paying for rent or food, they may receive credit for these payments under certain conditions, including if the noncustodial parent was ordered to pay such support; if an in-kind agreement between the parents has been filed with the court and approved by ORS prior to requesting assistance for cash support; or if there is no support order and the noncustodial parent made in-kind support payments prior to the noncustodial parent's first contact with ORS.^{xvii} The Co-Parenting Mediation Program also offers services such as neutral exchange and visitation sites to custodial and noncustodial parents.^{xviii}

Child Support Enforcement

In order to collect unpaid child support, the Office of Recovery Services (ORS) may take a number of steps to induce payment, including, but not limited to: withholding support from the parent's wages, intercepting federal and state payments, placing liens on real and personal property, and reporting the parent's debt to credit agencies.^{xix}

Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities

The Utah Commission on Marriage falls under the purview of the Utah Department of Workforce Services and is designed to help Utah residents create and sustain healthy marriages. Members of this commission include individuals, program practitioners, and scholars. Among its other duties, the Utah Commission on Marriage helps residents locate available marriage education workshops, makes policy recommendations, and provides information on marriage and divorce in Utah.^{xx}

Other Marriage Initiatives

Utah State University currently uses funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to provide marriage skills education and marriage enhancement activities to low-income couples in stepfamilies.^{xxi}

Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits

Cash benefits are provided to low-income one- or two-parent families in Utah under the Family Employment Program. There is a lifetime limit of 36 months on receipt of Family Employment Program benefits in the state of Utah. Extensions to this 36-month limit are available for a number of reasons, however, including: if a recipient, in good faith, is unable to complete training and find employment within 36 months or if a recipient was employed for at least 80 hours per month in the previous month as well as in six of the previous 24 months. Immediately upon receiving Family Employment Program benefits, individuals must participate in work activities for at least 34 hours per week. In two-parent families, one parent must participate in work activities for at least 40 hours per week, and the other parent must participate for at least 20 hours per week.^{xxii}

Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers

The Co-Parenting Mediation Program offers neutral exchange and visitation sites to custodial and noncustodial parents in order to increase contact between noncustodial parents and their children.^{xxiii} Furthermore, low-income noncustodial fathers may be eligible to receive employment services and training through the Workforce Investment Act.^{xxiv}

Job Training and Employment Services

Utah operates a network of One-Stop Employment Centers that provide services and service referrals to workers in the state. Services available to all residents include skills assessments, online services, labor market information, workshops, job referrals, and service referrals. Additional services, such as case management, career assessment, career counseling, training, and social services, are available to those individuals whose needs cannot be met by core services. Low-income individuals may also be eligible to receive additional support services, such as child care and transportation assistance.^{xxv}

Incarceration and Reentry

Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

The Utah Department of Corrections offers educational programming, life skills education, apprenticeships, employment training, substance abuse treatment, and other programming to inmates in order to prepare them for successful re-entry into society.^{xxvi} Included in this are a number of parenting programs, including Doctor Dad, which helps fathers of infants and young children gain parenting skills, and Inside Out Dad, which helps fathers maintain relationships with children of all ages and aims to develop parenting knowledge and skills.^{xxvii}

Resources

- **Utah Co-Parenting Mediation Program.** This Web site provides information about the Co-Parenting Mediation Program, designed to help divorcing parents resolve disputes and maintain parent-child interactions, and about available services; available at <http://www.utcourts.gov/mediation/cpm/index.asp>
- **Utah Marriage.** The homepage of the Utah Commission on Marriage provides information about marriage in Utah and available workshops and training; available at <http://www.utahmarriage.org/>
- **Paternity Matters.** This Web site provides information about paternity establishment for parents and for those working with unmarried parents; available at <http://www.paternitymatters.utah.gov/index.html>

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