

Preventing the Need for Child Support

The child support program can help prevent the need for its services by promoting responsible childbearing and parenting choices and by raising awareness—especially among teenagers—of the financial, legal, and emotional responsibilities of parenthood.

Why should the child support program try to prevent the need for its services?

When parents live apart from their children, the child support program uses a range of strategies to try to assure that children receive support from both parents. While parents who do not live together can support and raise successful, healthy children, preventing the need for child support services in the first place is better for families and more cost-effective for the public.

Child support caseloads are driven by the increasing number of children born to unmarried parents—a trend that reached record numbers in 2009, the latest year preliminary data are available. That year, 41 percent of all births were to unwed parents.¹ And among births to teen mothers, 87 percent were to unmarried parents.² Having children outside of marriage is associated with higher child poverty, poorer educational outcomes for children, and greater public costs including increased child support enforcement expenditures.³ Unwed teen childbearing, in particular, is associated with negative consequences for teen parents and their children. Two-thirds of families begun by a young unmarried mother are poor⁴ and approximately one-quarter of all teen mothers go on welfare within 3 years of the child's birth.⁵

How does preventing the need for child support services improve child support outcomes?

Educating young people about the role of child support can encourage voluntary paternity establishment, parenting that supports healthy child development, and responsible childbearing choices.



When teenagers hear about the financial and legal implications of having a child out of wedlock, they learn that acting responsibly benefits them and their future children. And they learn that acting responsibly includes acknowledging paternity if a child is born out of wedlock. Emerging research finds that an increased understanding of the financial costs of parenthood can be particularly persuasive in helping young men make more responsible decisions around childbearing.⁶

What does the child support program do to prevent the need for its services?

Child support education explains the financial, legal, and emotional responsibilities of having children outside of marriage, and may be combined with programs on related issues, such as reducing teen or unplanned pregnancies, preventing family violence, teaching parenting skills, and helping teen parents improve their relationship skills.

Child support programs often partner with middle schools and high schools, fatherhood programs, and pregnancy prevention programs to reach young people through educational strategies such as public service announcements, presentations, classes, videos, peer discussions, and other activities.

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Examples of how state child support programs are promoting responsible childbearing and parenting:

California—It Happened 2Me: It Could Happen 2U2

What it does: The *It Happened 2Me* grant project partners with local school districts, high school students and the Public Health Department to educate teens and young adults (ages 14-24) about the importance of establishing paternity and providing support for their children from birth. Teens and young adults formed an Advisory Group to assist the Kern County Department of Child Support Services in developing and distributing child support information designed to appeal to this demographic and communicate the child support message in a manner that is easily understood. To help deliver this message, the Advisory Group developed a website that allows users to make contact with the Department to ask questions or simply find information that is relevant to their situation.⁷

Results: As of June 2011, 644 teens and young adults have accessed the *It Happened 2Me: It Could Happen 2U2* website.

Michigan—The Responsibilities of Parenting: R U Ready?

What it does: This multi-session curriculum for high school students aims to raise their awareness of the legal and financial responsibilities of being a parent. The Michigan Office of Child Support Enforcement has recently made the curriculum available to high schools throughout the state.

Minnesota—Dads Make a Difference (DMAD)

What it does: High school teens teach middle school youth about the importance of fathers in families, healthy relationships, the responsibilities of parenting, and the challenges of too-early parenting through this nonprofit organization.

Results: Since 1994, nearly 3,000 high school teens have been trained to teach the program's curriculum and over 71,000 middle school youth have participated in the classes. DMAD evaluations since 2003 have consistently shown a significant increase in students' intent to delay parenting, knowledge of child support and legal fatherhood issues, and ability to identify risks.⁸

New York and Texas—No Kidding: Straight Talk from Teen Parents

What it does: *No Kidding* is a peer education program that trains young parents to talk to middle and high school students about paternity, parental responsibilities, and child support.

Results: The Texas Office of the Attorney General developed this program in 2004. Since then, nearly 60,000 students have observed a *No Kidding* presentation. The New York City Office of Child Support Enforcement adopted this program in spring 2009. As of June 2011, 4,222 students had participated in the program.

Pennsylvania—Teen Pregnancy Prevention & Child Support Education

What it does: Several county Domestic Relations Sections currently give presentations to high school students about Pennsylvania's child support program. The state child support program is in the final stages of developing a standardized child support education program to be presented in high schools statewide.

Texas—Parenting and Paternity Awareness (p.a.p.a.)

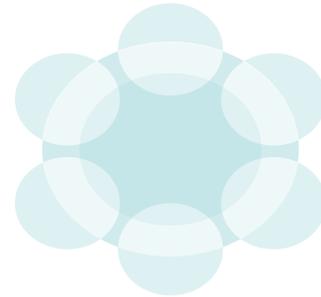
What it does: P.a.p.a. was developed in the 1980s as a school-based curriculum teaching high school students about the rights and responsibilities of parenthood and paternity establishment, the consequences of being a parent, and the elements of a healthy relationship. P.a.p.a. became a mandatory part of the state's health curriculum in 2007.

Results: More than half a million students participated in p.a.p.a. during the first two years that it went statewide. Studies consistently find that after taking the class, more students say they plan to delay having children until after marriage. Participants also say they have acquired greater knowledge of the legal issues that unwed parents face and the costs associated with being a parent.⁹

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Virginia—Responsible Adolescent Program and Making It Real

What it does: The Manassas District Office works with the Prince William County Schools to help run the program *Making It Real* and with Fauquier County Schools to help run the *Responsible Adolescent Program (RAP)*. Both programs are designed to teach high school students the value of pursuing long-term objectives, such as obtaining a good education and delaying parenthood. RAP is a single class presentation given to students in 9th and 10th grade health classes and early childhood development/life management skills classes. *Making It Real* is a simulation game in which students experience work and family life at age 25 for a randomly assigned occupation and family situation. The Manassas District Office provides both programs with information about paternity and child support.



References

Examples provided in the *Promoting Child Well-Being & Family Self-Sufficiency* Fact Sheet Series are funded using child support program matching funds and other funding sources.

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