



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

Responsible Fatherhood State Profile: Oklahoma

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www.fatherhood.gov

Oklahoma

Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities

The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI), a partnership between numerous government agencies and private organizations, works with married and unmarried couples to strengthen families, build and sustain healthy marriages, and reduce divorce rates in the state. OMI offers free marriage and relationship education programs across the state and uses the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) curriculum.ⁱ OMI also provides a marriage mentoring program and offers training and technical assistance to community marriage education programs.ⁱⁱ

Other Marriage Initiatives

Recently-awarded federal grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have enabled government agencies and private organizations to provide additional programs and supports for couples. For example, the Oklahoma Department of Human Services received funding to provide marriage education services to married parents of disabled, special needs, and high-risk children.ⁱⁱⁱ Oklahoma State University, in partnership with OMI, conducted a statewide survey from 2001 to 2002 about attitudes towards marriage and divorce, relationship quality, marriage education, usage of government services, and other topics related to relationships and marriage.^{iv}

Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs

Using Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds, the Oklahoma Department of Human Services contracts with the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI) to offer the Family Expectations program. This 30-hour program uses the Becoming Parents and Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) curricula and works with new parents to improve parenting skills, increase understanding of child development, and strengthen couple relationships. The program offers specific information on the father-child relationship and co-parenting.^v

Take Time to Be a Dad Today



State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood

The Oklahoma Department of Health, as well as county health departments, offer abstinence-based education programs, such as Wisdom in Sexuality Education & Understanding Parenting (W.I.S.E. U.P.), in order to increase family communication, help teens make positive decisions, promote healthy lifestyles, and prevent risky sexual behavior and pregnancy among teens.^{vi} Low-income individuals and those eligible for Medicaid are also eligible for family planning services, including contraception, sterilization procedures, and office visits, through the Department of Human Services.^{vii}

The Family and Medical Leave Act

Oklahoma abides by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (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. 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. Furthermore, public sector employers must allow employees to use sick leave to care for family members.^{viii}

Domestic Violence Services

A number of domestic violence programs across the state offer crisis intervention, emergency and transitional housing, advocacy, counseling, and other support services.^{ix} Furthermore, the Oklahoma Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault educates residents about domestic violence; provides training to public officials and employees; works with local service providers to identify gaps in service and supports; and coordinates events and contacts involving state agencies, the medical and judicial system, law enforcement, and the private sector.^x Oklahoma also has an address confidentiality program, which ensures that abusers cannot locate their former victims using public records.^{xi}

Child Custody Policy

Oklahoma has no preference or presumption for joint custody. Instead, custody arrangements are based upon the best interests of the child, including whether the parents are likely to cooperate with each other, both home environments, and any other factors deemed relevant.^{xii} The court system also may require parents involved in a custody, visitation, or paternity case to participate in a parenting education program designed to teach them about co-parenting, the effects of separate parenting on children, conflict management, child development, and parents' financial responsibilities.^{xiii}

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. Establishing paternity also gives a child born outside of marriage the same legal rights as a child born to married parents. Oklahoma has an in-hospital paternity establishment program. When paternity is uncontested, parents can establish a child's paternity by completing an Acknowledgment of Paternity form. When paternity is contested, both parents and the child must undergo genetic testing in order to establish paternity.^{xiv}



Child Support Assistance

The Oklahoma Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED), operating within the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, ensures that all children receive financial support from both parents and that families become and remain self-sufficient. The CSED works with parents to locate noncustodial parents and their employers; establish legal paternity; establish child support and medical support orders; modify orders as necessary; and enforce support orders for married, separated, or divorced parents. These services are available to noncustodial parents and to anyone with custody of a child, including parents, legal guardians, or other relatives.^{xv}

Child Support Enforcement

In Oklahoma, the Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED) may utilize a number of methods to collect unpaid child support. The CSED may withhold income from the parent's salary, unemployment benefits, retirement accounts, or other income source; send the parent an annual notice with information on the amount due and the penalties for nonpayment; place levies on bank accounts; intercept federal and state income tax refunds; place a lien on the parent's home, property, Workers' Compensation, or insurance benefits; inform credit bureaus of the debt; suspend the parent's passport or professional, driver's, or recreational license; or request that the parent be held in contempt of court.^{xvi}

Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits

In Oklahoma, low-income families with children can receive cash assistance through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. There is a 60-month lifetime limit on receipt of benefits.^{xvii} In Oklahoma, two-parent families receiving TANF benefits face stricter work requirements than one-parent families receiving TANF benefits. In one-parent families, the work-eligible adult must participate in an average of 30 hours of work activities per week. In two-parent families where neither parent is disabled, one adult must participate in work activities for an average of 30 hours per week, and the other must participate for an average of 35 hours per week. Core work activities include subsidized and unsubsidized employment, participation in a Work Experience Program that provides training and skills, on-the-job training, job search activities, community services, and vocational training.^{xviii} Oklahoma also offers diversion assistance to provide immediate, short-term assistance to families with children.^{xix}

Oklahoma provides marriage incentives for families receiving TANF benefits to encourage marriage among low-income families. Specifically, a new spouse's income is not factored into a family's eligibility for three months.^{xx}

Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers

The state of Oklahoma offers specialized employment services to specific populations, including noncustodial parents of children receiving TANF.^{xxi} The state also offers a number of parenting programs to incarcerated fathers to improve their relationships with their children and to facilitate their transition back into society.^{xxii}



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Job Training and Employment Services

Oklahoma operates 52 Workforce Oklahoma Centers, created as a result of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, which provide services to job seekers across the state.^{xxiii} Services offered include job search information, referrals to other agencies, skills assessments, skills training, on-the-job training, educational opportunities, individual counseling, and case management.^{xxiv} Several populations, including hard-to-serve TANF recipients, individuals whose TANF benefits have expired, and noncustodial parents of children receiving TANF, are eligible to receive services funded through the Welfare-to-Work Block Grant. These populations can receive job readiness services, employment and training activities, post-employment services, and support services to enable long-term employment and promote self-sufficiency.^{xxv}

Incarceration and Reentry

Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

The Oklahoma Department of Correction offers a number of programs specifically designed for incarcerated fathers, such as Long Distance Dads, Empowered Parenting, Homes of Honor, and Parenting and Family Values. At many facilities, the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative offers life skills and relationship programs using the PREP curriculum as well as other family-strengthening programs.^{xxvi}

Resources

- **Oklahoma Marriage Initiative.** This Web site provides information about the history of the OMI and on programs and workshops related to marriage and relationships; available at <http://www.okmarriage.org/>

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