



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

www.fatherhood.gov

Responsible Fatherhood State Profile: Georgia



Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities

Georgia does not directly use state funds for marriage promotion programs. However, pilot marriage programs funded by the federal government and by nongovernmental sponsors are available in the state. These programs seek to provide marriage and relationship-skills training to unmarried expectant parents in order to strengthen their relationships. These programs also provide direct services and service referrals to participating couples. In addition, several programs work with high-school aged youth to provide information on healthy relationships, life skills, and financial management. Georgia State University also is conducting a public awareness campaign to promote marriage and marital stability.ⁱ

Other Marriage Initiatives

The Georgia Healthy Marriage Initiative, a five-year program offered in sites around the state, is a relationship skills program designed to promote healthy marriage and father involvement in Georgia with the goal of increasing the number of marriages and decreasing the number of divorces, child support cases, and out-of-wedlock pregnancies.ⁱⁱ In addition, recently enacted federal legislation has allowed the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to provide funding for marriage education programs in the state. One program offered by Morehouse College uses the PAIRS curriculum with both married and unmarried couples to teach healthy marriage, conflict resolution, and financial planning strategies, as well as to help participants find employment.ⁱⁱⁱ

Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs

The Georgia Department of Human Resources offers a Teen-Parent Improvement Program (TIP) that offers on-site child care to teen parents who want to complete their high school education. The program also provides teen parents with health services and parenting education.^{iv} The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services also has provided funding to the Georgia Department of Human Resources to provide parenting education, counseling, and mediation services to noncustodial fathers.^v

State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood

Georgia funds a number of programs designed to prevent early and/or unwanted pregnancies. Georgia's Department of Public Health funds organizations that offer male involvement programs for youth between the ages of 10 and 19 who are at risk of becoming fathers at young ages. The department also funds an Abstinence-Only Education Program, which encourages youth to abstain from sexual activity, and Comprehensive Adolescent Health Centers, which offer pregnancy prevention programs, youth development activities, and family planning services. These programs aim to reduce substance use, premarital sex, and other risky behaviors through collaboration with businesses, community organizations, faith-based organizations, schools, and parents.^{vi} The Teen-Parent Improvement Program also offers health services and child care, with the goal of preventing teen parents from having subsequent pregnancies.^{vii}

The Family and Medical Leave Act

Georgia 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. 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. Georgia has no state provisions for paid leave.^{viii}

Domestic Violence Services

A number of community-based programs in the state provide 24-hour crisis hotlines, legal services, parenting education, shelters, and referrals to victims of domestic violence. Georgia also uses Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds to conduct domestic violence assessments of TANF recipients and to provide service referrals where necessary. Georgia's court system has established a grant program through which victims of domestic violence can receive legal assistance with child support, housing, public benefits, employment, and other legal issues.^{ix}

Child Custody Policy

When married couples with children divorce voluntarily, both parents have the right to petition any Georgia circuit court to determine the custody of their children. Custody decisions are made in the best interest of the children, which includes factors such as the age of the children and each parent's ability to care for the children.^x

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. Georgia has an in-hospital paternity acknowledgement program. When paternity is uncontested, parents can establish a child's paternity either in the hospital or through signing a Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgment form. When paternity is contested, parents must go through a judicial process in which the alleged father may have to participate in genetic testing.^{xi}

Child Support Assistance

Georgia operates a child support program through its Department of Human Resources' Office of Child Support Services (OCSS). The OCSS aims to improve the well-being of children by ensuring that they receive financial and medical support from both parents. The OCSS helps parents establish paternity, file a support order, and receive payment after orders have been set.^{xii} Noncustodial fathers who are unable to pay their child support awards are eligible to participate in Georgia's Fatherhood Program, operating under the OCSS and the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education. This program offers educational opportunities, training, life-skills development, workforce preparation, comprehensive services, and job-search assistance to parents to increase their ability to pay child support.^{xiii}

Child Support Enforcement

Georgia employs a number of enforcement remedies against noncustodial parents who do not pay child support. The state can seize child support payments from wages, unemployment benefits, workers' compensation benefits, tax refunds, lottery winnings, and bank accounts. In addition, the state may place liens on property; report the parent's unpaid payments to credit bureaus; file contempt-of-court actions; and suspend driver's, professional, or other licenses. When a parent is more than \$5,000 in arrears, the state may also suspend or revoke the parent's passport.^{xiv}

Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits

The state offers welfare benefits to two-parent families on the same basis as to single-parent families. A 48-month lifetime limit exists on receipt of benefits in Georgia. Parents receiving financial assistance must participate in full-time work activities, although training and education may fulfill this requirement for some parents.

Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers

The Fast Track to Jobs program, a six-week program for noncustodial fathers between the ages of 16 and 21, offers fathers vocational exploration, skills-development, and support services, and sponsors other activities designed to enhance fathers' employability and support of their children.^{xv}

Job Training and Employment Services

One-stop workforce service centers around Georgia offer vocational training, job-readiness, job-search, mentoring, and support services to job seekers. Low-income fathers are eligible for employment services through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Family (TANF) program and through Georgia's Fatherhood Initiative.^{xvi}

Incarceration and Reentry

Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

Georgia offers incarcerated fathers the opportunity to participate in parenting education, parenting skills, and relationships skills programs, as well as programs to prevent family violence.^{xvii} The state also operates a number of Pre-Release Centers that prepare inmates for life outside of prison and promote family reunification efforts.^{xviii}

Resources

- **Georgia's Fatherhood Program.** This Web site provides an overview of the Fatherhood Program, including information on employment and other resources; available at http://www.state.ga.us/GAFatherhood/who_we_are.html
- **Georgia Department of Human Resources.** This Web site provides information on the services offered to Georgia residents, including the Teen-Parent Improvement Program, family planning and pregnancy prevention initiatives, and child support services; available at <http://dhr.georgia.gov/portal/site/DHR/menuitem.24259484221d3c0b50c8798dd03036a0/?vgnnextoid=e5c9e1d09cb4ff00VgnVCM100000bf01010aRCRD>

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