



NRFC State Profiles Washington (2012)

This profile describes state-funded and federally funded programs and policies that aim to strengthen families. These programs and policies support parenting and father involvement, help couples maintain strong bonds, enhance fathers' economic stability, and provide support during incarceration and reentry. The profile lists phone numbers and websites for the programs. This information was correct when the profile was written (in 2012) but may change over time.

Programs to Support Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

Responsible fatherhood programs often focus on improving parenting skills, keeping fathers involved with their children and helping them pay child support. A few such programs, shown in the table below, are available in the state.

Program or Organization	Topic	Description	Contact Information
Parent Trust	Parenting	State-funded programs teach new fathers infant-care skills, and also provide community support groups for parents and in-home parenting education classes.	www.parenttrust.org/index.php?page=expectant-new-parent-program (800) 932-HOPE
Children's Home Society of Washington	Parenting	Programs provide parenting education, peer mentoring, and skills for new dads.	www.childrenshomesociety.org/Our_Services/Family_Support/Parent_Education.html (206) 695-3200
Northwest Marriage Institute	Parenting	Federally funded workshops, located in southwest Washington, focus on responsible parenting and conflict resolution.	www.northwestmarriage.org (360) 260-1100
First A.M.E. Child Development Center	Parenting	State-funded program offers parenting education classes (one-on-one and group sessions) to low-income fathers of Head Start children in Seattle.	www.famecfc.org/contact.html (206) 322-9600
Take Charge	Preventing unwanted or early fatherhood	State-funded program provides family-planning services to low-income men and women with incomes up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level.	hrsa.dshs.wa.gov/familyplan/take%20charge/TC%20Provider%20Directory.htm

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Programs to Promote Healthy Relationships

Programs that support healthy marriages and relationships may focus on skills such as communication and dealing with conflict. One such program, shown in the table below, are available in the state.

Program or Organization	Topic	Description	Contact Information
Northwest Marriage Institute	Healthy marriage and relationships	Federally funded program helps prepare people for marriage and offers counseling services to couples in southwest Washington, regardless of their ability to pay.	www.northwestmarriage.org (360) 260-1100

Programs to Support Prevention of Domestic Violence

Programs to prevent domestic violence may offer shelters for victims, counseling, and legal advice. A few such programs, shown in the table below, are available in the state.

Program or Organization	Topic	Description	Contact Information
Department of Social and Health Services' Domestic Violence Program	Domestic violence prevention	State program provides emergency counseling, legal advocacy services, a statewide hotline, and shelters for victims of domestic violence.	www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca/dvservices (800) 562-6025

Programs to Enhance Economic Stability

Economic stability programs help parents support themselves and may include services to help fathers find jobs or increase their earnings. A few such programs, shown in the table below, are available in the state.

Program or Organization	Topic	Description	Contact Information
Access Washington: Employment; WorkSource	Temporary cash assistance/ job training and employment	State programs provide job training and employment services, including services offered through one-stop WorkSource employment and training centers.	access.wa.gov/employment/index.aspx www.wa.gov/esd/coreservices_seeker.htm
Job Corps	Temporary cash assistance/ job training and employment	Federal job training program helps low-income young people reach their educational and career goals.	www.jobcorps.gov/centers/wa.aspx

Programs for Incarceration and Reentry

Programs for incarceration and reentry aim to meet the needs of people involved with the criminal justice system. One such program, shown in the table below, is available in the state.

Program or Organization	Topic	Description	Contact Information
Department of Corrections	Incarceration	State program helps inmates build and maintain strong family relationships. Services include parenting classes, help reuniting with family members, referrals to other resources, and support and mentoring groups for families.	www.doc.wa.gov/family (360) 725-8213 www.doc.wa.gov/facilities/prison/default.asp

Policies to Promote Responsible Fatherhood and Parenting

The Family and Medical Leave Act

Washington abides by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and has also passed a Family Care Act and Family Leave Act. The state leave policies extend the FMLA in several ways. The state policies allow all workers with paid leave benefits to use earned sick leave or other paid time off (such as vacation time) to care for family members. Family members may include:

- A minor child—biological, adopted, foster, stepchild, or legal ward—with a routine or severe health problem
- A legal spouse, registered domestic partner, parent, parent-in-law, or grandparent with a severe health problem
- An adult child—biological, adopted, foster, stepchild, or legal ward—with a chronic or temporary disability or a severe health problem

It also removes the federal mandate that an illness must last for at least three consecutive days to be eligible. Employers who fail to comply with the FMLA or the state laws can be fined up to \$1,000 per instance.ⁱ

Paternity Establishment

Establishing paternity is the legal process to be identified as the father of a child. There are four ways to establish legal paternity in the state. First, if parents marry before the birth of the child, the husband is the child’s legal father, unless this is challenged by someone else. Second, if the mother is in a registered domestic partnership while she is pregnant, her partner is the legal parent, unless this is challenged by someone else. Third, a man can sign a “paternity acknowledgment” form. He will be deemed the child’s legal father after the form is signed, notarized, and filed at the Washington State Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics. Fourth, a court may determine the legal parent, which may require a genetic test of the mother, child, and alleged father.ⁱⁱ

Child Custody

Under state law, the courts make decisions about child custody when parents cannot reach an agreement. Courts base these decisions on what they conclude to be in the “child’s best interest.” State law defines this as the parenting arrangement that best keeps the child healthy and stable. The state holds that it is often best when the parent and child maintain their existing bond as much as possible. However, a child may need to be separated from a parent if the child is at risk of harm.ⁱⁱⁱ

Child-Support Assistance

The Division of Child Support (DCS) is in charge of child support in the state. DCS sets up, reviews, and changes child-support obligations and also collects the payments. Parents may receive child support if they have custody of a minor child or if they used to have custody of a minor child and are owed back support.^{iv} Parents may be able to modify a child support order due to a “significant change in circumstances,” including losing a job, incurring a disability, or having new children to support.^v

Child-Support Enforcement

If a noncustodial parent fails to pay child support, DCS may withhold wages or other income. DCS may also withhold an IRS tax refund, seize personal property, or charge the parent with contempt or federally criminal nonsupport. If a custodial parent is unable to locate the absent parent, DCS can search across states to find him or her and enforce the child support order. Noncustodial parents whose children (or the mothers of whose children) receive welfare may be able to receive state welfare services if they cannot pay child support; this depends on state approval and available funds.^{vi}

Policies to Promote Responsible Economic Stability

WorkFirst & Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Washington’s welfare program is called WorkFirst. The goal of this program is to reduce poverty and promote financial self-sufficiency by moving low-income families from welfare to work. Welfare benefits are offered only to (those eligible are) low-income parents who live with and are the main caregivers for a minor child. Select services may be extended to noncustodial parents who fail to pay child support. WorkFirst services, in addition to temporary cash assistance, include employment services, education and training programs, and career development. Most individuals are limited to 60 months of lifetime benefits under this program.^{vii}

References

ⁱTo learn more about the Family Leave Act, see <http://www.lni.wa.gov/WorkplaceRights/files/FamilyLeaveFAQs.pdf>. To learn more about the Family Care Act, visit <http://www.lni.wa.gov/WorkplaceRights/files/policies/esc10.pdf>.

ⁱⁱTo learn more about paternity establishment, see <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/dcs/services/parents.asp#p1>. You can also contact the state agency responsible for paternity establishment at (800) 442-KIDS.

ⁱⁱⁱTo learn more about state custody laws, see <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?Cite=26>.

^{iv}To learn more about state child-support assistance policy, see <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/dcs/> or contact the DCS, Community Relations Unit at (800) 457-6202.

^vTo learn more about modifying a child support order, see <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/dcs/services/modification.asp>.

^{vi}To learn more about state child-support enforcement, see <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/dcs/> or contact the DCS, Community Relations Unit at (800) 457-6202.

^{vii}For more information on WorkFirst, see <http://www.workfirst.wa.gov/> or call (877) 501-2233.