



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



National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

NRFC State Profile: Tennessee September 2016

This profile describes state and federally funded programs and policies that aim to strengthen families. These programs and policies support parenting and father involvement, promote strong family relationships, 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 2016) but may change over time.

Programs to Support Responsible Fatherhood and Strengthen Families

Responsible fatherhood programs focus on issues such as enhancing parenting and relationship skills, keeping fathers involved with their children, improving their economic stability, helping them pay child support, and generally helping to strengthen families.

The following state and federally funded programs are available in the state:

Organization	Services Provided	Description	Service Area and Contact Information
Catholic Charities of Tennessee, Inc.	Fatherhood/Parenting Economic Stability	The state and federally funded Catholic Charities of Tennessee, Inc. runs <i>Creating Hope by Assisting Parents (CHAP)</i> . A CHAP counselor provides parenting education and crisis intervention for families. The program helps parents build their positive parenting skills and learn strategies to address child-rearing challenges. Catholic Charities also provides employment assistance for refugees through three programs: <i>Match Grant</i> , <i>Social Services</i> and <i>Targeted Assistance</i> . Services include employment pre-screening and assessment, job readiness training, job counseling, bilingual coaches, and administrative support.	Middle Tennessee. Website (615) 352-3087

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Organization	Services Provided	Description	Service Area and Contact Information
First Things First	Fatherhood/Parenting Healthy Relationships	The state funded First Things First offers classes for individuals and couples to develop skills to strengthen their relationships, marriages, and parenting. Services include group meetings for expectant fathers.	Hamilton County. Website (423) 267-5383
Job Corps	Economic Stability	<i>Job Corps</i> is a federal job training program to help low-income young men and women ages 16 to 24 with educational and career goals.	There are two Job Corps centers in Tennessee. They are located in Memphis and Bristol. Website Memphis office: (901) 396-2800 Bristol office: (423) 878-4021
Metro Nashville Public Health Department	Fatherhood/Parenting Preventing Unwanted/ Early Fatherhood	The Nashville Public Health Department operates programs for family and youth, including <i>Healthy Beginnings</i> and the <i>Adolescent Healthy Futures Program</i> . <i>Healthy Beginnings</i> is a home visiting program to strengthen first time families and prevent child abuse and neglect by providing education about child safety, health, disease prevention, and development; parenting skills classes; and resource assistance. <i>Adolescent Healthy Futures</i> reduces teen pregnancy through community awareness and educational programs serving high risk teens.	Nashville. Website (615) 880-2187

Organization	Services Provided	Description	Service Area and Contact Information
Tennessee Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence	Domestic Violence	<p>The state and federally funded Tennessee Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence supports and assists domestic and sexual violence prevention agencies and shelters in Tennessee and offers the following services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Batterer’s intervention. • Domestic violence. • Sexual assault. • Legal clinic services. <p>The coalition also trains service providers, conducts statewide advocacy to support victims of domestic violence, and creates awareness on the issue of domestic violence.</p>	<p>Serves the entire state.</p> <p>Website</p> <p>615-386-9406</p> <p>800-289-9018</p>
Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development	Economic Stability	<p>The Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development offers job-search assistance, education/job training, skills assessments, and other employment services for unemployed workers, veterans, dislocated workers, and other state residents through <i>Tennessee Career Centers</i> in every county. The <i>Career Centers</i> also provide free access to computers and the Internet, telephones, and fax machines. The website includes additional employment resources and a state job bank.</p>	<p>Serves the entire state.</p> <p>Website</p> <p>Website with center locations</p> <p>(844) 224-5818</p>

Organization	Services Provided	Description	Service Area and Contact Information
Tennessee Department of Corrections	Reentry Economic Stability Healthy Relationships	The Tennessee Department of Corrections provides reentry services for inmates through Correctional Release Centers. Services include employment readiness, family reunification, life skills, career readiness, certificates, substance use, cognitive restructuring, and victim impact.	Serves the entire state. Website (615) 741-1000

Policies to Promote Responsible Fatherhood

Paternity Establishment

Establishing paternity gives a child born outside of marriage the same legal rights and privileges as a child born to married parents. Children gain access to family medical history and rights to inheritance, fathers’ medical and life insurance benefits, social security and veterans’ benefits, and child support. In addition, Native American children gain tribal enrollment rights.

In Tennessee, unmarried fathers can sign a Voluntary Acknowledgement of Paternity (VAoP) to establish paternity at the time of the child’s birth. These forms are available at the hospital, local Health Department and local child support office. Parents can establish paternity at any time before the child turns 21, but the VAoP process is only available until the child turns 19. If either parent has doubts about who the father is, he/she should not sign the VAoP. Tennessee’s child support office can schedule DNA testing to determine whether or not the individual is the father. After positive DNA testing results are returned to the local child support office from the certified DNA lab, paternity will be established through court order.ⁱ

Child Custody

If unmarried or divorced parents cannot reach agreement concerning child custody or visitation, a legal order can be made through the court system. Either parent may be granted custody of the child, or both may share equally in physical custody and/or decision-making responsibilities. There is no legal connection between payment or non-payment of child support and rights to visitation.

The Tennessee Parenting Plan law focuses on the child’s best interest and encourages parents to move away from the concepts of “custody” and “visitation” to emphasize the concept of “parenting responsibilities.” The overall goal of the plan is to reduce hostility and encourage parents to work cooperatively.ⁱⁱ If parents cannot come to an agreement by themselves, the court will award custody. The court will favor a custody arrangement that allows both parents to have as much participation as possible in the life of the child, with factors such as the mental/physical health of the parents and each parent’s ability to manage parenting responsibilities taken into account. Possible exceptions include if a parent has a history of violence, domestic abuse, or child abuse.ⁱⁱⁱ

Child Support

The Federal Child Support Enforcement Program was established in 1975 as Title IV-D of the Social Security Act to locate noncustodial parents, establish paternity and establish and enforce child support orders. General services available in all states and territories include voluntary in-hospital paternity acknowledgement, genetic testing, explanation of state guidelines for determining child support orders, and review of child support orders at least every three years at the

request of either parent. State child support offices are responsible for the collection and distribution of child support payments and can modify orders when appropriate. If a parent is behind in their payments, the office may use enforcement tools such as license revocation (including drivers, professional, recreational or occupational licenses), seizure of assets, property liens, passport denial, and federal and state tax refund offsets.^{iv}

Tennessee's Child Support Program has offices located across the state in all 31 Judicial Districts. The services are provided through local district attorneys, DHS staff, and private agencies under contract with the state. Go to the [website](#) or call (615) 313-4700 for more information.

The Family and Medical Leave Act

The federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) protects employees who have worked with the same organization for at least twelve months and worked at least 1,250 hours within the past year. It contains provisions for both fathers and mothers to take time off after the birth or adoption of a child, or during a serious illness, without fear of losing their jobs. Employees in companies with 50 or more employees are entitled to up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave, over a one-year period, to care for a new child, recuperate from a serious illness, care for a seriously ill family member, or handle issues arising from a family member's call to active military duty. The FMLA also gives employees the right to take up to 26 weeks of leave to care for a family member who is seriously injured or becomes ill while on active military duty.^v

In addition to the rights provided by federal Family and Medical Leave Act, Tennessee Family and Medical Leave Law requires that employers who have at least 100 employees at the same jobsite where the employee works must give an eligible employee up to four months off for pregnancy, childbirth, nursing an infant, or adoption.^{vi}

Head Start

Head Start is a federally funded school readiness program for young children from low-income families. The program, currently delivered by about 1,700 local organizations – public and private, non-profit and for-profit – provides preschoolers with comprehensive services, such as education and health screenings, with the goal of building their skills across five school readiness domains: language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical development and health, and social and emotional development. Head Start encourages the role of parents (both mothers and fathers) as their child's first and most important teachers. Programs build relationships with families that support positive parent-child relationships, family well-being, and connections to peers and community. Early Head Start, also managed by the federal Office of Head Start, is directed toward children up to the age of three and their parents. While the program is federally funded and managed, local agencies make decisions regarding service delivery based on the specific needs of their communities; for example, some may opt to include home-based services for families in their programs. Most states have multiple Head Start programs providing services for fathers.

To find information on Head Start programs in Tennessee, go to this [website](#).

Policies to Promote Economic Stability

Child Care Assistance

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) works with states to provide support for children and their low-income families. Subsidized child care services are available to eligible families through certificates (vouchers), grants, or contracts with providers. Fathers and mothers may select a child care provider that satisfies applicable state and local requirements, including basic health and safety requirements.^{vii}

Tennessee's Child Care Certificate Program provides financial help for child care costs for eligible low-income families through various assistance programs. *Families First Child Care Assistance* is for parents participating in the *Families First* program (see TANF section for more information) who need child care to complete the work activities in their

personal responsibility plan. *Families First* parents do not have a co-pay in this program. Eligibility is based on *Families First* income guidelines.

Transitional Child Care Assistance is provided for working parents in the *Families First* program whose case is closed. Parents are provided with 18 months of transitional child care assistance to help them transition off the program. There is a work activity requirement for each parent in order to be eligible for this program. Parents must pay a co-pay fee based on a sliding income scale. Children who are receiving *Families First* and being cared for by someone other than their parent(s) may be eligible for *At Risk Child Only* child care assistance. Caretakers must pay a co-pay based on a sliding income scale.

Teen Parent Child Care Assistance is for eligible high school or middle school parents to receive child care assistance in order to stay in school. Parents must pay a co-pay fee based on a sliding income scale.^{viii}

Rental Assistance

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides rental assistance to low-income families and individuals through a number of methods. HUD subsidizes privately owned apartments, allowing low-income tenants to rent them at reduced rates. In the Public Housing program, local housing agencies manage rental housing for low-income tenants, while HUD provides professional and technical assistance in their planning, development, and management. The Housing Choice Voucher Program, better known as Section 8, provides eligible families and individuals with vouchers that they can use to pay for all or part of the rent at housing units of their choice. Generally, eligibility for the HUD rental assistance programs is based on annual gross income, assets, family size, and other considerations such as elderly or disabled status. Local housing agencies generally set the fixed eligibility rules for their regions, determine assistance amounts, and manage waiting lists for assistance.^{ix}

The Tennessee Housing Development Agency administers the Housing Choice Voucher program in 72 Tennessee counties, between four regional offices (East, Middle, South Central, and West Tennessee). Families applying for rental assistance must meet both federal and Tennessee income limits. Interested applicants must submit an application with the public housing agency who administers the program in the county where they wish to live.^x

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the Food Stamp program, provides low-income individuals (both men and women) and families with funds delivered in an electronic benefit transfer card, or EBT card) that can be used to purchase food. SNAP is administered within the Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Services and is federally funded, but applications, delivery, and outreach are handled at the state or local level. In general, individuals and households are eligible to receive SNAP if they have less than \$2,250 in countable resources and earn less than 130 percent of the poverty line in gross monthly income. However, characteristics of recipients (for example, age or disabled status) can affect eligibility requirements, and states have flexibility in determining eligibility, particularly with regard to what is considered a countable resource. In many states, individuals over the age of 18 and under the age of 50 are limited to three months of SNAP benefits every three years unless they are working or in a work or training program 20 hours a week. Some states have waivers to this rule for all or part of the state – for detailed state eligibility requirements, consult the [state SNAP agency](#).^{xi}

In Tennessee, families may apply for SNAP online^{xii} or by fax, mail, or in-person to a local Department of Human Services county office. To receive SNAP benefits, most able-bodied people between 16 and 59 years old must register for work, participate in an Employment & Training Program if offered, accept offers of employment, and cannot quit a job. Able-bodied adults aged 18 to 49 without dependents can receive only a limited number of benefit months in 3 years, unless they have been working 80 hours per month or are otherwise determined exempt from the rule. Families

must also meet income and asset requirements to be eligible for SNAP. The income limit is based on the household size and gross income.^{xiii}

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program grants federal funds to states for developing and implementing their own welfare programs that provide assistance and work opportunities to needy families.

Families First is Tennessee's TANF program. It is a workforce development and employment program that is temporary and has a primary focus on gaining self-sufficiency through employment. The *Families First* program helps participants reach self-sufficiency by providing transportation, child care assistance, education, job training, employment activities, and other support services. Temporary cash assistance is also provided for families with dependent children when at least one parent is incapacitated, unemployed, deceased, or absent from the home, and the family is unable to pay for essential living expenses. To be eligible for the program, participants must meet technical and financial eligibility standards and must agree to follow a Personal Responsibility Plan (PRP). As part of the PRP, the participants agree to keep immunizations and health checks up-to-date for their children, to keep their children in school, to cooperate with child support services and, if not exempt, to participate in work and/or training for at least 30 hours per week. Tennessee also provides Family Focused Solutions (FFS), a voluntary support service that is provided by agencies that are contracted with the Tennessee Department of Human Service. FFS assists TANF clients with removing barriers to employment and education. FFS provides clients with a counselor that will collaborate and assist them in reaching self-sufficiency.^{xiv}

Other Helpful Resources

University of Tennessee Extension

The University of Tennessee Extension's state funded Center for Parenting links parents to resources and classes in East, Middle, and West Tennessee. Some classes are in French or Spanish. The extension also conducts trainings for parent educators, and provides research on parenting and parent education. Parents can access resources and search for classes on the Center for Parenting's [website](#).

References

ⁱ For more information on paternity establishment in Tennessee, see

<http://www.tennessee.gov/humanservices/article/child-support-establishing-paternity>,

<https://tn.gov/health/article/vr-faqs>, and

http://tennessee.gov/assets/entities/humanservices/attachments/Establishing_Paternity.pdf.

ⁱⁱ For more information on Tennessee's Parenting Plan, see <http://www.tncourts.gov/programs/parenting-plan> and <http://www.tncourts.gov/programs/parenting-plan-info/about-parenting-plan>.

ⁱⁱⁱ For more information on court awarded custody in Tennessee, see

http://www.womenslaw.org/laws_state_type.php?id=13971&state_code=TN.

^{iv} For more information on the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, see www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css.

^v For more information on the Family and Medical leave Act, see <http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs28.pdf>.

^{vi} For more information on FMLA in Tennessee, see <http://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/tennessee-family-medical-leave.html>.

^{vii} For more information on the Child Care and Development Fund, see <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/about/what-we-do>.

^{viii} For more information on Tennessee's Child Care Certificate Program, see

<https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/article/child-care-certificate-program> and

<https://tn.gov/humanservices/article/child-care-financial-assistance>.

^{ix} For more information on Rental Assistance, see http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/topics/rental_assistance.

^x For more information on the Tennessee Housing Development Agency, see <https://thda.org/renters/hcv>.

^{xi} For more information on SNAP and to find services in your state, see <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/apply>.

^{xii} To apply online for SNAP in Tennessee, see <https://faonlineapp.dhs.tn.gov/>.

^{xiii} For more information on SNAP in Tennessee, see <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/topic/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>.

^{xiv} For more information on Families First and Family Focused Solutions, see <http://www.tennessee.gov/humanservices/topic/families-first-tanf>.