



# Promoting Responsible Fatherhood

*Every father taking responsibility for his child's intellectual, emotional, and financial well-being.*

June 2012



## Introduction

*“I came to understand the importance of fatherhood through its absence – both in my life and in the lives of others. I came to understand that the hole a man leaves when he abandons his responsibility to his children is one that no government can fill. We can do everything possible to provide good jobs and good schools and safe streets for our kids, but it will never be enough to fully make up the difference.”*

*– President Barack Obama, June 19, 2009*

Being a dad is one of the most important jobs a man can have. The greatest advantage a child can have is the love and support of a strong and stable family and the research clearly indicates the benefits to children who have two actively engaged parents.<sup>1</sup>

Families of all shapes and sizes love and provide for the needs of their children, including families headed by grandparents, same sex couples, and single parents. And in families of all types responsible parenting remains a crucial part of ensuring a child’s well-being. The President has often described the “hole a man leaves when he abandons his responsibility to his children [as] one that no government can fill.” And while millions of single-mother households across the country are doing whatever it takes to provide for their families, we know that without a father doing his part it can be a struggle to meet the many obligations parents face.

Responsible fathering means taking responsibility for a child’s intellectual, emotional, and financial well-being. This requires being present in a child’s life, actively contributing to a child’s healthy development, sharing economic responsibilities, and cooperating with a child’s mother in addressing the full range of a child’s and family’s needs.

Today, however, one out of every three children in America – over 24 million in total – lives in a home without their biological father present.<sup>2</sup> And data show that low-income men from communities of color are significantly more likely to be nonresident fathers than resident fathers.<sup>3</sup> Roughly one out of every three Hispanic children and more than half of African-American children grow up in homes without their fathers present.<sup>4</sup>

The presence and involvement of a child’s parents protects children from a number of vulnerabilities. More engaged fathers—whether living with or apart from their children—can help foster a child’s healthy physical, emotional, and social development.<sup>5</sup> While evidence shows that children benefit most from the involvement of resident fathers, research has also highlighted the positive effect that nonresident fathers can have on their children’s lives.<sup>6</sup>

The choice to be an active, engaged parent is influenced by factors in the family and the community. For example, it can be especially hard for fathers who are trying to do the right thing to maintain their dignity and motivation in the face of unemployment or underemployment.<sup>7</sup> In addition, fathering is influenced by culture, which must support and

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reinforce messages and behaviors that lead to fathers taking active roles in the healthy development of their children.<sup>8</sup> This requires deliberate actions and messages by the public and private sector, as well individuals in communities and homes across the country. These, and other complex factors, contribute to the way fathers choose to engage with their children.<sup>9</sup>

As the father of two girls, President Obama knows firsthand the power of fathers being present in the lives of their children and families. As a man who grew up without a father present in his life, he also knows the pain created when a father chooses to leave his children behind and the powerful role mentors and other adults play in filling that void.



Soon after taking office, the Obama Administration began leading forums across the country to discuss how we, as a country, can work together to promote responsible fatherhood through personal and community responsibility. In 2010, the President asked that an interagency working group begin finding ways to encourage activities and policy developments that promote responsible fatherhood. Since then, the Responsible Fatherhood Working Group has coordinated policy, programmatic activities, and engagement efforts on fatherhood across federal agencies.

In June 2010, the President Obama took a major step in his longstanding agenda on fatherhood by launching the [Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative](#). This Initiative is an ongoing national effort to promote responsible fatherhood and encourage positive role models through partnerships with fatherhood and family-serving groups around the country. While this effort aims to encourage dads to support their own children, it also recognizes the important role that mentors and role models can also play in supporting children and families. Finally, the President's FY 2013 budget offers new investments to improve the Child Support Enforcement Program, sustain funding for Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grants, and promote strong family relationships.

A summary of the Obama Administration's notable accomplishments and upcoming actions begins on page six.

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### Mission, Goals, and Strategy

President Obama launched the interagency Responsible Fatherhood Working Group in order to advance responsible fatherhood and stable families through enhanced coordination and collaboration across federal agencies. Led by the [White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships](#), the [Office of Public Engagement](#), and the [Domestic Policy Council](#), the overarching goal of this interagency effort is to encourage fathers to take responsibility for the intellectual, emotional and financial well-being of their children.



The Obama Administration seeks to accomplish **five goals** through coordination of federal efforts:

- Promote and create positive opportunities for fathers to engage in the intellectual, emotional and financial well-being of their children.
- Support and sustain stable and healthy environments for children and parents, particularly by strengthening the economic stability of low-income fathers and supporting healthy relationships between parents.
- Strengthen and solidify relationships among fathers, children, and families early in a child's life.
- Support and encourage disconnected fathers to reconnect with their children and families.
- Promote the identification and use of evidence-based practices, as well as fostering high-quality research on fathers and fathering to support policy and program development.

The Obama Administration is using **three strategies** to accomplish these goals:

- Implement policies and activities that promote healthy, ongoing relationships among fathers, families, and children.
- Use the Administration's convening power to coordinate communication and high-impact engagement efforts that promote a positive culture shift around fatherhood.
- Pursue public-private partnerships that leverage outside resources to further promote positive outcomes for fathers and their children.

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To this end, the Responsible Fatherhood Working Group serves to enhance communication and collaboration across government entities in order to explore policy and public engagement opportunities that advance our mission.

Eleven federal partners are involved in this work:

- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- U.S. Department of Commerce
- U.S. Department of Education
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- U.S. Department of Labor
- U.S. Department of Justice
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- Corporation for National and Community Service
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
- Office of National Drug Control Policy

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# At-A-Glance

Below is a snapshot of the Obama Administration's record in promoting and strengthening fatherhood over the last three years, as well as upcoming efforts that the Administration will take in the coming months to build upon our record.

### The Administration's Record

- ***The President's Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative.*** In 2010, President Obama launched a multifaceted initiative to encourage fathers to become better parents and inspire partners to promote responsible fatherhood across the country. The effort launched with a revamped [National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse](#), the President joining dads from across the country in a fatherhood pledge, and a series of public forums and roundtables to catalyze a new dialogue on fatherhood in local communities.
- ***Fatherhood Buzz.*** Through the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, the Department of Health and Human Services launched the [2012 Fatherhood Buzz Barber Shop Tour](#), a new initiative designed to reach out to dads with positive information through their barbers and barber shops in eight major cities. Each quarter, selected barbershops will feature a different "buzz" topic – the topic for the first quarter is financial literacy and job training.
- ***Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood.*** The Department of Health and Human Services has awarded 55 [Pathways to Responsible Fatherhood Grants](#), which help fathers overcome barriers to becoming effective and nurturing parents while helping them improve their relationships with their children.
- ***Updating the Child Support Enforcement Program.*** The Department of Health and Human Services recently announced that it will issue more than \$10 million in [competitive grants](#) in order to implement and evaluate employment programs that are designed to link noncustodial parents to employment and improve payment of child support. In addition, the Administration will [support pilot projects](#) that will explore innovative strategies to increasing child support payments and creating parenting time opportunities for non-custodial parents.
- ***Reconnecting Homeless Veterans with their Children.*** President Obama, through the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Health and Human Services, launched a [pilot program](#) that helps homeless veterans gain permanent housing, assists them with child support obligations, and connects them with programs that offer employment and supportive services. More than 1,000 veterans have been referred to project partners for services, resolving nearly \$800,000 in old child support debts.

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- **Transitional Jobs for Non-Custodial Parents.** The Department of Labor's \$40 million [competitive grant program](#) supports local efforts to prepare unemployed noncustodial parents, and other individual with significant barriers to employment, for work through transitional employment, while assisting them to gain unsubsidized employment intended to promote family engagement and long-term self-sufficiency.
- **Encouraging Financial Literacy.** The [Building Assets for Fathers and Families Initiative](#) provides asset building services and financial education that encourage non-custodial parents to establish savings accounts and access other services to increase financial stability.
- **Responsible Fatherhood for Ex-Offenders.** The Administration provided funding for mentoring projects that focus specifically on the issue of parenthood as well as dedicated funding to help parents of young children through the *Second Chance Act*.
- **Connecting Fathers and Families to Services.** The Department of Housing and Urban Development has engaged in a nationwide public engagement campaign through its [Reconnecting Family and Dads Initiative](#). In 2011, 209 PHAs from thirty-three states held events that combined supportive services with promoting responsible fatherhood, reaching an estimated 22,000 parents and children. In June 2012, the Initiative expects to reach over 300 PHAs and reach over 30,000 family members.

### Upcoming Administration Efforts

- **Making Child Support Work for Families.** The Obama Administration is taking steps to create more efficient child support enforcement procedures that encourage local program innovation, including awarding \$1.2 million in Parenting Time grants that will pilot and evaluate promising best practices to support noncustodial parents paying child support and also spending time with their children.
- **Encouraging Fathers to Get Involved Early.** The Administration and the National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement will disseminate the new foundational "Building Blocks for Father Involvement" resource materials and provide training at regional and national conferences beginning with the launch in October 2012.
- **Creating Responsible Fatherhood Tools for Local Communities.** The White House and Administration officials will continue to engage fathers and private partners through forums, local hero events, roundtables, webinars, blogs, media, and updates on [Fatherhood.gov](#). The Administration will also develop a Fatherhood Heroes toolkit that local faith and community based groups can use to recognize fathers and supporters of responsible fatherhood by October 2012.
- **Growing Partnerships.** The Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnership will continue to partner with businesses and organizations to identify ways to support fathers and families by offering discounts on products that create opportunities for dads and families to connect with their children.

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### The President's Budget

The President has a long history of supporting policies that lift up fathers—expecting them to take responsibility for their children, but also helping them be the fathers they want to be by making policy changes and offering services that encourage healthy and active paternal involvement. The President's FY 2013 Budget outlines a number of legislative proposals that encourage responsible fatherhood.

#### The President's Budget

##### *The Child Support and Fatherhood Initiative*

The Child Support Enforcement Program plays an important role in facilitating family self-sufficiency and promoting responsible fatherhood. Building on this role, the FY 2013 Budget includes several legislative proposals that encourage fathers to take responsibility for their children and promote strong family relationships while continuing a strong commitment to the establishment and enforcement of child support orders. These include:

- **Ensuring children benefit when parents pay child support.** The proposals include investing more than \$1.7 billion over ten years to ensure that more of the support paid by fathers reaches their children. Examples of these policies include encouraging states to pass through current child support collections to families enrolled in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, rather than retaining those payments, and requiring that when children are in foster care the child support payments made on their behalf are used in their best interest.
- **Fostering fathers' engagement in their children's lives.** The FY 2013 budget proposes \$580 million over ten years to support and integrate increased access and visitation services into the core child support program. These services not only improve parent-child relationships and outcomes for children, but can also lead to more regular payment of child support. Research shows that when fathers spend time with their children, they are more likely to meet their financial obligations.
- **Improving enforcement and establishment.** The Child Support Enforcement Program is already an efficient program: for every dollar invested in the program in 2010, \$4.88 was collected in child support. The President's budget includes several new proposals aimed at increasing and improving collections further and improving program efficiency. Examples of these policies include requiring states to adjust child support debt owed to the state so that it is a manageable amount for fathers to pay; providing tribal child support programs with access to the Federal Parent Locator Service, other enforcement tools, and grant programs; and discouraging states from accumulating unpaid child support debt during incarceration.

##### *Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Grants*

The President continues his strong commitment to supporting family and fatherhood by proposing sustained funding of \$150 million for Healthy Marriages and Responsible Fatherhood activities. The \$75 million in healthy marriage funds are used for a number of services including pre-marital education, marriage enhancement programs, marriage education, and relationship skills programs that often include parenting skills, financial management, conflict resolution, and job and career advancement. These voluntary programs include domestic violence safeguards. The \$75 million in responsible fatherhood funds are used for fatherhood activities intended to promote or sustain marriage, promote responsible parenting, and foster economic stability.

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### Reading this Report

This report serves to inform the public of the President's efforts to promote responsible fatherhood across America. The White House has sought, and continues to seek, input and ideas for innovative action on promoting responsible fatherhood not just from federal agencies, but also from experts and practitioners in the private sector, nonprofits, academic institutions, and those working in the field throughout the country. Each section, outlined below, relates to the Administration's goals around fatherhood, with efforts to promote research and evidence-based practice mentioned throughout report. Finally, the report ends with what more we must do, together, to encourage fathers to take responsibility for the intellectual, emotional, and financial well-being of their children.

- Promoting Fatherhood Involvement
- Supporting and Sustaining Stable Families
- Intervening During Early Childhood
- Reconnecting Disconnected Fathers
- What You Can Do

## Promoting Fatherhood Involvement

*“Our children don't need us to be superheroes. They don't need us to be perfect. They do need us to be present. They need us to show up and give it our best shot, no matter what else is going on in our lives. They need us to show them – not just with words, but with deeds – that they, those kids, are always our first priority.”*

*– President Barack Obama, June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2010*

Our government can build the best schools with the best teachers, but parents are a critical part of ensuring that kids do their homework, read books instead of watching television, and have experiences that help them grow into healthy adults. The Obama Administration has focused on using federal programs and policies, as well as cross-program and external partnerships, to create and promote opportunities for fathers to engage in positive fathering of their children.

### A New Dialogue about Fatherhood

On the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Father's Day, June 17, 2010, the President called for the start of a new dialogue about fatherhood across the country. To begin this dialogue, the White House worked with seven different federal agencies to host roundtable discussions and town halls across the country that engaged local leaders and organizations in a conversation about the relevance of fatherhood within each community. These events also served as an opportunity to see how fatherhood is an important issue that intersects with other work led within federal agencies.

#### A New Dialogue about Fatherhood: First Fatherhood Forums

**Chicago, IL:** The Department of Health and Human Services hosted a roundtable discussion and public forum on fatherhood programs, mentoring, and youth violence.

**Manchester, NH:** The Department of Education hosted a public forum on the importance of male engagement in the education system and the role of mentoring.

**Atlanta, GA:** The Department of Justice led a public conversation and held a roundtable discussion with local leaders around prisoner reentry, domestic violence, and mentoring.

**Oakland, CA:** The Commerce Department and Small Business Administration collaborated to hold a forum and roundtable on jobs, economic development, and diversity in the workplace.

**Fort Bragg, NC:** The Department of Veterans Affairs hosted a forum and roundtable on military and veteran fathers, as well as wounded warriors.

**Little Rock, AK:** The Department of Education led a discussion and roundtable on the role Historically Black Colleges and Universities can play in responsible fatherhood.

**Albuquerque, NM:** The Department of Agriculture led a roundtable discussion and public forum about fatherhood in rural and tribal communities.

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### The President's Fatherhood Pledge

Launched during the summer of 2010, the President's Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative has several components to encourage fathers to become better parents and inspire partners to promote



responsible fatherhood across the country. President Obama launched the effort by announcing the revamped [National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse](#) and joined dads from across the country in a fatherhood pledge—an effort to encourage individuals, especially fathers, to be involved in the lives of their children, and to be positive role models and mentors for the children in their lives and communities.

The [President's Fatherhood Pledge](#) asks organizations to raise awareness of the Fatherhood.gov website, which features articles, tips, and resources from prominent leaders in the fatherhood and family fields, as well as information about model programs that promote responsible fatherhood. The site has statements and videos from the President; information for dads, practitioners and researchers; and contact information for responsible fatherhood programs around the country. Just one year later, more than 20,000 individuals have pledged that they are actively supporting fatherhood in their local community.

### Initiating Innovative Education Campaigns

For many men, neighborhood barbershops are community hubs that serve far more than grooming needs. These community-gathering places serve as trusted venues to discuss personal and public issues like family, politics, health, money, and other life issues. This unofficial outlet for peer education provides a unique opportunity to share healthy information about fatherhood and the role of fathers in society.



Recognizing the importance of neighborhood barbershops, the Obama Administration and the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse launched the [2012 Fatherhood Buzz Barber Shop Tour](#) as part of the President's effort to engage fathers in local cities and communities in conversations about fatherhood and fundamental skills to support a family. For the project's inaugural tour, the Obama Administration will be working in eight cities across the country—Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York City, Philadelphia, Albany, and Washington, D.C.— to increase awareness about responsible fatherhood and parenting

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through local barbershops. In addition to conversation starters about fatherhood, barbershops in these cities receive quarterly information around topics like financial empowerment and economic stability, opportunities for fathers to support their children's educational success, and men's health.

### Partnering to Promote Fatherhood

Inspired by the President's Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative, organizations supporting the Initiative are working in their own innovative ways to help make a positive culture shift around fatherhood. To date, hundreds of partners and thousands of individuals have been directly engaged to promote responsible fatherhood and mentoring and create opportunities for fathers to engage with their children.

For example, the NFL Players Association hosted community forums on responsible fatherhood with prominent members of the Association and the National Fatherhood Leaders Group has developed a resource guide for local nonprofit organizations interested in starting fatherhood programs. Partners from the National Parent Teachers Association to the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities also signed up to advance the President's Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative through their activities.

Sports celebrities have also joined the President's effort to support fathers. For example, NBA All-Star Dwyane Wade speaks to fathers and organizations about why fatherhood is important to him and why promoting responsible fatherhood should be a priority for our country. Administration officials, such as Secretary Arne Duncan and Attorney General Eric Holder, also regularly speak to large audiences on the issue of fatherhood.

#### President Obama's Fatherhood & Mentoring Initiative

**Fatherhood Public-Private Partnerships:** This effort engages groups around the country to join the President in celebrating fatherhood by creating meaningful opportunities for fathers and children to connect. Partnerships include the American Association of Zoos and Aquariums, VH1, Major League Baseball, the NFL Players Association, and others. Each of these partners has committed to creating low or no-cost activities for fathers to engage with their children.

**Fatherhood Heroes:** To begin local conversations about fatherhood, and celebrate men who are doing the right thing, the White House hosts a series of local Fatherhood Heroes events across the country. Cities have included Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Dallas/Fort Worth, and Orlando, with more to come.

**Fatherhood Roundtables:** To encourage organizations, faith communities, business, law enforcement, and other partners in local communities to do more to support fathers, a series of roundtable discussions have been held in cities like Detroit, New Orleans, Denver, Chicago, and Philadelphia, among others.

**Fatherhood Webinars:** The Administration has also used technology to reach communities across the country. For example, the Department of Justice hosted a webinar reaching over 1,000 people within the faith community about the importance of responsible fatherhood in communities to prevent youth crime, best practices and approaches to working with children and families of returning offenders, and building both traditional and non-traditional partnerships.

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These partnerships are a necessary complement to the work of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships and Office of Public Engagement in hosting community forums and webinars that catalyze actions and conversations on fatherhood around the country.

### Leveraging Local and Regional Resources

The Administration is also leveraging existing resources to reach out to the public in order to grow awareness and mobilize local efforts, celebrate local role models, and gather ideas from those working in specific communities. The Department of Education is facilitating parent outreach events to encourage father engagement in the lives of children and their education. Teams have held parent forums across the nation, established listening and learning sessions with parents, held workshops based on input from the community, conducted events and webinars, and published multilingual outreach documents to engage different populations.

Regional offices of the Administration for Children and Families within the Department of Health and Human Services are engaging locally to promote responsible fatherhood throughout the country. The New York and Atlanta Regional Offices are coordinating the East Regional Fatherhood and Healthy Families Summer Institute, a three-day institute to expand practitioner abilities, organizational capacity building, research and program evaluation, and networking. The Chicago and Seattle Regional Offices held educational sessions to provide fathers information on how to use asset-building tools such as banking and savings, matched savings, financial education, credit and debt, free tax services, and accessing public services. The Philadelphia Regional Office holds a monthly responsible fatherhood and Healthy Families Conference Call to provide a forum for researchers, practitioners, policymakers, stakeholders, and concerned citizens to learn and share fatherhood and healthy families programming strategies. These are just a few examples of the many projects regional offices are orchestrating throughout the country to promote responsible fatherhood.

### Parenting Time for Noncustodial Parents

Parenting time, also known as visitation, is the time that a non-custodial parent spends with a child and is often scheduled by court order. Research shows that effective parenting time services can increase the amount and reliability of child support payments, while also improving parent-child relationships and the relationship



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between a child's parents.<sup>10</sup> This creates a “double win” for children and families – an engaged parent and better financial security. Making use of this research, the Obama Administration has proposed new initiatives that will foster the safe engagement of noncustodial parents – typically fathers – in their children's lives and help parents who do not live together navigate their co-parenting roles.

To identify best practices and promising programs in this area, the Obama Administration, through the Department of Health and Human Services, will award grants in 2012 for child support pilot projects that explore innovative strategies for creating parenting time opportunities, while safeguarding against family violence. These [Special Improvement Project grants](#) will provide \$1.2 million over the next four years for child support agencies to pilot strategies to develop, implement, and evaluate service delivery models establishing parenting time orders along with child support order. States currently use Access and Visitation funds to provide services such as supervised visitation, mediation, education, counseling, and development of parenting plans for children in foster care and in the child support system. The pilots will complement this ongoing work of child support agencies and courts to better serve parents and their children.

## Supporting & Sustaining Stable Families

*“Between my own experiences growing up, and my ongoing efforts to be the best father I can be, I’ve learned a few things about what our children need most from their parents. First, they need our time. And more important than the quantity of hours we spend with them is the quality of those hours. Maybe it’s just asking about their day, or taking a walk together, but the smallest moments can have the biggest impact. ”*

*– President Barack Obama, June 18, 2011*

Healthy families not only provide a better environment for children, they also improve the well-being of parents and society. Since taking office President Obama has pursued strategies to support parents working together to raise their children, sustaining healthy marriages, and accessing the skills and supports needed to provide for their families.

### Strengthening Families and Supporting Healthy Marriages

In 2010, President Obama supported and signed into law a bill that authorized \$150 million for [Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grants](#). The bill provided for an increased investment in Responsible Fatherhood programming from previous funding of \$50 million to \$75 million per year.

Using these appropriated funds, the Department of Health and Human Services awarded sixty Community-Centered Healthy Marriage Grants, which are designed to help couples that choose marriage gain greater access to marriage education services that enable them to

#### Fatherhood Program in Kentucky

*“The information given to me by the facilitators has made a difference in my life, with my fiancée and her children. It has helped all of us to become closer and more open in our communication as a family. The facilitators showed by examples in their own lives how this information can benefit the lives of many and all families.” – Participant, Council on Prevention and Education: Substances, Inc.*

acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages. These grants are supporting local community organizations that provide skill-based marriage education, premarital counseling, and other services to promote healthy marriages. In El Centro, California, for instance, these funds are supporting the The Imperial Valley Regional Occupational Program (IVROP) *Juntos* project to promote togetherness in families and to provide services designed to improve marriage and relationship skills as well as promote job and career advancement activities. IVROP has also received funding for its *Padres* responsible fatherhood project, a family-focused evidence based program which helps fathers succeed as parents and as providers.

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The Administration also awarded fifty-five Pathways to Responsible Fatherhood Grants, which fund projects that support healthy marriage activities, encourage responsible parenting, and foster economic stability. This program is designed to help fathers overcome barriers to becoming effective and nurturing parents while helping them improve their relationships with their children. The grants support services such as skill-based parenting education, mentoring and mediation, and other services to promote responsible fatherhood. For example, these funds are supporting the West Virginia Pathways to Responsible Fatherhood Initiative of the Kanawha Institute for Social Research & Action, Inc. (KISRA), a faith-based, nonprofit community development corporation. The KISRA Fatherhood Program aims to encourage noncustodial fathers to become more involved in their children's lives and to help unemployed and underemployed fathers achieve economic self-sufficiency by providing them with occupational and life skills training as well as supportive services so that they can support and reconnect with their children. These projects have already shown promising outcomes, and the Obama Administration is conducting a rigorous evaluation process to learn more about what works to promote responsible fatherhood and healthy marriages.

### Identifying What Works

*The Obama Administration is carrying out a rigorous evaluation through the [Parents and Children Together \(PACT\) Evaluation](#) of family, marriage, and responsible fatherhood programs. The evaluation asks three central questions:*

- *What are the challenges in creating and running comprehensive responsible fatherhood and healthy marriage education services for lower-income fathers or couples?*
- *How do these programs impact relationship quality, parenting behaviors, economic outcomes, and adult and child well-being?*
- *What are the experiences of fathers and couples who volunteer for these programs?*

*Reports on programs and participants' experiences will be produced annually and a final impact report will be released in 2016.*

*Information on PACT and the findings from earlier studies of family, marriage, and responsible fatherhood programs can be [found here](#).*

### Tailoring Efforts to Better Reach Families and Fathers

Through the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative, the Administration has made a deliberate effort to conduct outreach to practitioners and community organizations to address specific populations. Efforts currently underway will help tailor efforts to the African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and Native American communities to promote culturally competent strategies that respond to the unique cultural, linguistic, demographic, and socioeconomic needs of these families and fathers.

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For example, under the [Administration for Native Americans'](#) Strengthening Families Initiative, the Obama Administration is supporting programs that incorporate culturally relevant strategies to strengthen families and foster child well-being in Native American communities. The Initiative provides fathers with education and activities that will help them overcome barriers to involvement in their children's lives. In New Mexico, the Initiative has supported fatherhood training and parental involvement activities since 2009, providing more than 1,100 individuals with fatherhood and parenting training. In Washington, the Initiative funds a father-child program that includes access to job training, financial, and health services to increase responsible fatherhood participation in children's lives. In Montana, the Initiative is supporting efforts to increase the number of children raised in environments free of family violence by providing adults with the information and skills they need to create healthy families. And in Hawaii, the Initiative is supporting services for teen fathers and providing healthy relationship training to hundreds of families. This is just a sample of the Administration's efforts to reach Native American communities. Together, these efforts are impacting tens of thousands of families across the country.

### Promoting Self-Sufficiency and Financial Stability

Improving parents' financial security has a direct and positive effect on a child's well-being. Most noncustodial parents can and do support their children. However, millions of low-income noncustodial parents have trouble meeting their child support obligations, and these obligations can further reduce the financial stability of low-income parents. The Obama Administration is



#### Transitional Jobs Grants in Georgia

*Harold was a military veteran who enjoyed driving trucks for a living. As a 44-year-old father of four children, Harold thought his life was set until he was arrested and lost his commercial driver's license. He was soon unemployed. While participating in the Georgia Fatherhood Program, Harold learned about the GoodTransitions program. He enrolled in the program and received training in timed-manufacturing, high-pace product assembly, and effective team-work strategies. Ultimately, he earned a professional certification and gained earnings and experience through a transitional job at Advanced Electronics Recycling Solutions. Harold obtained a full-time position at International Paper as a machine operator. With the new job and stable source of income, Harold started budgeting his resources and saving for his children's future. He also relocated to the city of Atlanta to be closer to family. Harold is now planning to enroll in school by 2013 to obtain a bachelor's degree. "I am not only financially secure, but also happy with my life overall."*

*- GoodTransitions Program*

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pursuing a two-pronged approach to addressing this problem: improving economic self-sufficiency and building financial stability.

In order to support the most efficient strategies for promoting self-sufficiency among fathers, the Obama Administration, through the Department of Labor, awarded nearly \$40 million in competitive [Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration](#) grants.

The majority of these awards are funding projects that support local efforts to prepare unemployed, noncustodial parents, and ex-offenders for work through transitional employment, while assisting them to gain unsubsidized employment intended to promote family engagement and long-term self-sufficiency. The demonstration project's random-assignment evaluation will compare employment, self-sufficiency, and parent-child relationship outcomes to measure the impact of transitional jobs program models for low-income, noncustodial fathers. An interim report will be produced in 2015 and a final report will be released in 2017 to inform future policy and program development.

The [Building Assets for Fathers and Families Initiative](#) (BAFF) aims to improve financial stability. Launched in 2010, this initiative supports asset building services for noncustodial parents as part of the child support program to encourage financial planning and saving, helping parents provide for their children. BAFF is part of a larger initiative implemented by the Department of Health and Human Services to extend the benefits of financial education, savings accounts, and other services to individuals and families with young children.

BAFF is especially focused on helping noncustodial parents, because although they are responsible for providing financial support to their children, they have not traditionally been the targets of financial empowerment programs. Through BAFF, the Obama Administration has awarded seven three-year demonstration grants that fund local partnerships aimed at increasing the financial stability of children and their parents. The Administration is also identifying promising field practices and strengthening relationships among local child support, financial stability, and fatherhood programs. As of May 1, 2012, over a 1,000 noncustodial parents participated in BAFF across the seven sites.

### **Updating the Child Support Program to Work Better for Families**

Research has demonstrated that a range of innovative strategies implemented by state, local, and tribal child support agencies can improve the reliability of child support payments.<sup>11</sup> With this research in mind, President Obama launched the [Family-Centered Initiative](#) to promote child well-being and family self-sufficiency.

The Family-Centered Initiative encourages state child support agencies to redirect activities toward productive, evidence-based enforcement tools and services that increase the reliability of child support payments and modernize the Child Support Enforcement Program to work better for children and families throughout the country.

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These modernizations include encouraging child support agencies to: establish realistic child support orders, adjust orders when noncustodial parents suffer a job loss, manage child support debts, intervene early when parents fall behind in their payments, direct all child support payments to families, and adopt other practices to improve the experience of parents participating in the Child Support Enforcement Program. As a result of the Obama Administration's federal leadership on this issue, dozens of states, counties, and tribes have incorporated the Family-Centered Initiative framework into their strategic planning, policies, and practices.

### *Two Improvements to the Child Support Enforcement Program*

*This year, the Obama Administration is making two improvements to the Child Support Enforcement Program in order to create greater flexibility for states to develop, implement, and rigorously evaluate programs that promote strong families and responsible fatherhood.*

*First, the Administration will issue a number of state waivers to link unemployed, noncustodial parents – typically fathers – who owe child support to work-oriented programs. This new flexibility will allow states to use federal dollars to help fund employment efforts that will better help parents find and keep jobs, from learning new skills to greater support and accountability in looking and applying for work. As of September 2011, at least twenty-nine states are operating statewide or local [work-oriented programs](#) for noncustodial parents – including Texas, Ohio, and New York.*

*Second, the Administration has announced that it will award more than \$10 million in [related competitive grants](#). These grants will allow states to pilot child support services, such as employment services that better support fathers in providing for their children financially, as well as programs that enhance how fathers can connect with their children and families. These grants will include a [rigorous research evaluation](#) to identify evidence-based practices.*

## Promoting Workplace Flexibility

President Obama knows that too many families must make hard choices between time caring for a new child or a seriously ill family member and earning a paycheck that families rely on. The [Family and Medical Leave Act](#) entitles tens of millions of workers to take job-protected, unpaid time off, but millions of families can't afford to use unpaid leave. A handful of states have enacted programs providing paid family leave insurance, but more states should have the chance. This is why President Obama's FY 2013 budget supports a \$5 million [State Paid Leave Fund](#) within the Department of Labor that will provide technical assistance and support to states that want to establish paid-leave programs.



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Research on the effect of California's paid family leave insurance program has shown that fathers are more likely to take time off to care for a new child than men without access to paid family leave insurance. This data suggests that paid family leave policies can encourage fathers to spend more time with their children.<sup>12</sup>

The President has also directed the Department of Labor to explore new data, through the [American Time Use Survey](#), to better understand how individuals use (or don't use) leave benefits. With the results of this survey to be released later this year, this new research will shed light on important information about workers' experience with leave and can help inform improved workplace flexibility policies.

## Intervening During Early Childhood

*“If we want our children to succeed in life, we need fathers to step up. We need fathers to understand that their work doesn’t end with conception – that what truly makes a man a father is the ability to raise a child and invest in that child.”*

*– President Barack Obama, June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009*

Early experiences matter, which is why providing a loving stable environment filled with trust is essential during pregnancy and through the first months and years of life. The future well-being of a child is strongly influenced by this environment, and parents play a critical role during these early stages of development. Actively involved, responsible fathers enable their children’s social and emotional development—establishing reciprocal relationships with their children, building trust and security, and laying the foundation for all future learning and social interaction. These early experiences help children develop a level of comfort with social interaction and a love for learning that ensures that children get a good first start and a fair shot at an opportunity for success. For these reasons, the Obama Administration is pursuing policies that empower local communities to encourage fathers to get involved in their children’s lives as early as possible.

### Leveraging Early Childhood Education to Promote Fatherhood

Encouraging fathers to shift their thinking and the way they interact with their children must be supported by the communities in which they live. The Obama Administration has actively promoted responsible fatherhood through the Office of Head Start. Since its inception, the Office of Head Start has sought ways to provide education, guidance, and support for communities recommending best practice strategies to support responsible fathering efforts. The Obama Administration’s leadership on this issue has expanded efforts to ensure fathers are respected, supported, and encouraged to take an active role in their children’s lives.

The Office of Head Start has also produced a number of educational materials on responsible fatherhood for communities throughout the country. The [Fatherhood Initiative Resource Guide](#) provides valuable resources to support fatherhood programming within Head Start and Early Head Start programs. The



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Fatherhoodfirst.org website offers service providers access to newsletters, podcasts, resources, and other media to assist providers in their work with fathers and families. Fatherhood First posters are displayed in many Head Start and Early Head Start Centers as an outward demonstration of support for father engagement and to establish a welcoming environment for dads in an effort to encourage their investment in children's learning. The Office of Head Start also supports the *Las Manos De Apá* (Hands of My Father) project, which focuses on supporting father involvement in Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs using a culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum, setting an example of what is expected of other programs. More than 1,500 Head Start programs across the country implement these engagement efforts each year.

### Expanding and Sustaining Early Father Involvement

More than a decade ago, the Office of Head Start released "[Building Blocks for Father Involvement](#)," a set of program guide books that continues to provide support and guidance for programs on how to prepare their organizations and staff to appropriately recruit, engage, and sustain father involvement in Head Start and Early Head Start programs. The Obama Administration is now supporting a complete revision and update to these documents that will provide communities and programs with the most up-to-date research-based lessons on how to appropriately engage fathers.

The guide books will show local service providers how to promote positive father-child relationships and father well-being, and how to develop responsible fatherhood goals resulting in school readiness outcomes. For instance, research suggests that dads are more likely to be present in the lives of their children when they are engaged early on.<sup>13</sup> The revised guidebooks will include a focus on reaching fathers early and helping to foster early connections between fathers and their children, as well as enhancing co-parenting relationships. Fatherhood research also highlights the positive impacts fathers have on their children when afforded opportunities to simply play with them.<sup>14</sup> As fathers learn the importance of how thoughtful interactions with their

#### Promoting Responsible Fatherhood in Communities through Head Start

*"I'm a father; my daughter goes to Southampton Head Start. How I got involved was pretty interesting 'cause what happened was my daughter's mother and I had went through a separation and she had lived out about 45 minutes away from where I lived. And it was difficult to see my daughter every day, and when I got to see her it was just -- it was emotional sometimes because it was something that I was going through, a transition from being with the family and now being a single father. And how I made it happen by getting involved in Head Start was going out to the school once in a while, you know, as much time as I had between work. I would go out there and read a book to the class, sit in the circle time, have breakfast with them. And I saw the impact that I was making on my daughter just by walking into the room and my daughter just running up to me and embracing me. I just knew that it was something that I knew I wanted to be involved with."*

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children can enhance their development, they are more likely to become empowered and motivated to be more active in the day-to-day development of their children. The revised guides will inform program administrators how to partner with fathers to increase their knowledge of their children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. The Building Blocks resource will be distributed by more than 1,500 programs across the country by October 2012, with the potential to reach hundreds of thousands of fathers.

### **Supporting the Health of Children and Mothers**

Since 2010, the Obama Administration has awarded over \$325 million in funding to States and Tribes for the [Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting \(MIECHV\) Program](#), which supports collaboration and partnership at the federal, state, and community levels to improve health and development outcomes for at-risk children through evidence-based home visiting programs. The MIECHV program includes fathers in the program, and state grantees are pursuing efforts to appropriately engage fathers specifically in their MIECHV home visiting programs. Connecticut, for example, will be evaluating a major father-specific component to home visiting, in addition to the model's regular home visits for families that have fathers involved with the child.

The Obama Administration is also pursuing public education strategies to reach families that include a mother and a father about responsible fatherhood through the Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) runs a [Fathers Supporting Breastfeeding Initiative](#) that provides educational messages about the advantages of breastfeeding. By supporting breastfeeding, some fathers can play a critical role in promoting the healthy development of their children and in strengthening family bonds. The WIC program also allows fathers to receive nutrition education, counseling, and referral services on behalf of their children.

## Reconnecting Disconnected Fathers

*“Our kids are pretty smart. They understand that life won’t always be perfect, that sometimes, the road gets rough, that even great parents don’t get everything right. But more than anything, they just want us to be a part of their lives.”*

*– President Barack Obama, June 18, 2011*

President Obama has encouraged fathers to be involved in their children’s lives, not just when it’s convenient or easy, but also when it’s difficult. For this reason, it is important to help fathers catch up on child support payments, reconnect fathers with their children, and ensure that fathers have the opportunity to spend time with their children. To support this goal of helping fathers reconnect and build strong relationships with their children, the Obama Administration is pursuing a wide range of strategies that make use of existing federal resources for public housing, child support, justice, and other programs.

### Using Housing Programs to Reconnect Fathers

Many fathers are often disconnected from services that could lead to economic stability for themselves and their children. To address the issues facing some fathers with children in public housing and voucher-assisted housing, the Obama Administration is using these housing programs to reconnect fathers both with their children and with supportive services.

The Administration’s Department of Housing and Urban Development has engaged in a nationwide public engagement campaign through its [Reconnecting Family and Dads Initiative](#). The Initiative recruits the support of local Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) to provide safe and instructive bonding environments for families while connecting fathers with services and developing positive male role models in public housing. In 2011, 209 PHAs from thirty-three states held Father’s Day events that combined supportive services with promoting responsible fatherhood. An estimated 22,000 parents and children participated in events that local PHAs held all over the nation. Local offices of federal agencies offered onsite information and services such as employment resources, healthcare consultation and legal counseling at the events. In some cities, participants met athletes from the NFL and NBA, who joined in on the fun, while the Read it LOUD! Foundation distributed more than 1,600 free children’s books to housing authorities that participated. In June 2012, this Initiative expects to reach over 300 PHAs and reach over 30,000 family members, with the intent to have PHAs commit to ongoing activities to engage fathers with their children throughout the year.

### Working to Ensure that Formerly Incarcerated

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### Fathers Don't Become Repeat Offenders

Nearly 730,000 individuals were released from state and federal correctional facilities in 2009. And the vast majority of individuals in our prisons are men. After having been “inside” for days, months, or years, these men – often fathers – are faced with life on the “outside” with no clear path back into their homes, communities, or workplaces in order to stabilize their lives and become productive citizens and parents. The transition is a difficult one—about half of all formerly incarcerated individuals will return to prison or jail within the first three years of release. Research shows that when incarcerated men and women are released, they look to their spouses, children, and families for support.<sup>15</sup>

President Obama is committed to improving outcomes for formerly incarcerated individuals reentering society through a number of strategies, including helping reconnect these individuals to their families.

The [Federal Interagency Reentry Council](#), established by Attorney General Holder in January 2011, coordinates reentry efforts and advances effective reentry policies across the federal government. Much of this work directly impacts disconnected fathers. The Council works to remove federal barriers to successful reentry so that formerly incarcerated individuals are able to compete for a job, attain stable housing, support their children and their families, and contribute to their communities to make a new life for themselves after serving their time.

For example, formerly incarcerated individuals trying to reenter society often face a number of “collateral consequences,” which are restrictions that can negatively affect their employment opportunities, government and housing benefits, and other forms of civic life. An important step towards both reducing recidivism and increasing public safety is to understand the full impact of the collateral consequences created by federal regulations, which is why the Attorney General has called for a comprehensive review to inform future efforts to reduce unnecessary barriers.

More recently, the Federal Interagency Reentry Council and the Responsible Fatherhood Working Group are coordinating to identify specific federal actions that better coordinate policies around child support that promote responsible fatherhood among the reentry population.

Over the past two years, the Department of Labor has also awarded \$32.2 million

#### Providing Support for Ex-Offenders and their Children in New Mexico

*“Frankie was motivated to get clean by the possibility of losing his son. About 18 months before his release, he signed up for mentoring through PB&J Family Services. The group brought Frankie’s son – seven at the time of his dad’s incarceration – to the prison for regular visits and supported them during and after visits. His PB&J mentors and caseworkers have helped Frankie focus on his sobriety – and he’s now been clean for four-and-a-half years. In addition to providing parenting classes, PB&J has helped Frankie as a father: ‘They prepared me to face up to everything I’ve done.’”*

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through twenty-eight individual grants to nonprofit faith-based and community-based organizations under the [Reintegration of Ex-Offenders Adult](#) program. The purpose of these grants is to provide an employment-centered approach to reintegration. Services include job training and employment preparation, mentoring, and connections to support services such as housing, substance abuse, and mental health programs.

In 2011, the Obama Administration's [Community-Centered Responsible Fatherhood Ex-Prisoner Reentry Pilot Project](#) made \$6 million in grants to four communities in order to address the challenges that face individuals who are being released from the criminal justice system. These grants have a strong emphasis on connecting the soon-to-be or recently-released individual to case management and counseling so that they can prepare for reintegration into society, as well as connecting reentering individuals to their families and children to promote active, engaged fathering. Additionally, services support reentry into the labor market through training or job search assistance and often work closely with local public housing authorities to reunite couples or support individuals in establishing housing on their own. The pilot will evaluate how these projects are implemented and the experiences and challenges addressed by grantees and participants to better identify effective strategies in supporting the reentry population.

### Fostering Discussion on Fatherhood Research & Policy

*In 2012, over 30 academic researchers and policy experts discussed new research at an Administration-supported conference, "[Fathers and Fathering in Contemporary Contexts](#)" hosted by the [National Center for Family and Marriage Research](#) and the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute for Child Health and Human Development. As a part of fostering this conversation on fatherhood research and policy, the Administration also supported a small grants competition on the topic of fathers and fathering, which included research areas such as parenting and co-parenting; paternal incarceration and the effect of relationship instability on fathering.*

*The two-day conference featured four of the five grant awardees and included panels of interdisciplinary researchers discussing cutting edge topics on fatherhood and fathering and new theoretical, empirical, methodological, and measurement insights. The conference opened and concluded with policy makers and program administrators discussing how research findings can help inform current policy debates. A conference report, summarizing fatherhood research findings and gaps to guide future research and policy development, will be released in December 2012.*

To further build the research on what strategies most effectively support the reentry population, the Administration also committed an additional two million dollars to enhance the [National Evaluation of Responsible Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated Fathers and their Partners](#) in 2011. The national evaluation will track long-term outcomes for fathers, their partners, and children who have participated in parenting and relationship education programs while the fathers were in prison.

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Finally, in addition to funding states and localities, the Administration has also used the [Second Chance Act](#) to direct funding to support the local efforts of nonprofits and Indian Tribes to launch mentoring projects for adults who have been incarcerated. The Second Chance Act is the first piece of reentry legislation that acknowledges the critical role that family plays in facilitating successful reentry and allows funds to be used for a wide range of services designed to improve parenting skills, facilitate family reintegration, and improve the functioning of the family through the provisions of counseling and education if needed. In 2011, for the first time, these mentoring grants were awarded to focus specifically on the issue of parenthood and dedicated funds to help parents of young children. Local community organizations in eight states – California, Florida, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and West Virginia– received these grants in 2011 and have already put the funds to use improving reentry outcomes for fathers and families throughout the country.

### **Reconnecting Homeless Veterans with their Children**

In 2010, President Obama launched a pilot program to reconnect homeless veterans with their children through a new partnership forged between the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Health and Human Services, and the American Bar Association. The [“OCSE-VA-ABA Collaboration Project”](#) helps homeless veterans gain permanent housing, assists them in meeting their child support obligations, and connects them with programs that offer employment and supportive services. More than 1,000 veterans have been referred to project partners for services, resolving nearly \$800,000 in old child support debts in the nine pilot project cities: Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, San Diego, Seattle, and Washington, D.C. To improve the work of the project partners and the service providers on the ground, the Office of Child Support Enforcement is currently developing a caseworker handbook on child support issues that are specific to military and veteran parents. Project partners are also developing a toolkit to highlight promising practices that will assist other partners interested in helping veterans.

## What You Can Do

### As a father...

- [Do more](#) to engage with your children. Every family context is unique, but there is often room for every parent to be more deliberate in the way they engage with their children and promote their healthy development.
- [Volunteer to become a mentor](#). Your experiences as a father can provide you



- with the skills and knowledge to be an effective role model. Being a mentor often means deliberately supporting a child within your extended family or community.
- Join President Obama and [take the Fatherhood Pledge](#). More than 22,000 supporters have taken the pledge to receive updates, tips, and resources from fatherhood organizations, prominent dads and other supporters of responsible fatherhood around the nation.
- [Connect with a Responsible Fatherhood program](#) near you by visiting the interactive responsible fatherhood program map. The map allows you to select your own state and find a comprehensive list of responsible fatherhood programs located in your area.
- [Visit the DadTalk Blog](#) to get updates on responsible fatherhood events and learn more about the developments in the field of responsible fatherhood research.

### As an individual...

- [Volunteer to become a mentor](#). While President Obama's initiative encourages all fathers to become engaged with their children, volunteer mentors and other role models will continue to play a meaningful role in the lives of children without actively engaged fathers. Being a mentor often means deliberately supporting a child within your own family or community.
- As a mother, neighbor, or a friend you can contribute to a culture of high parental involvement. This requires purposeful and consistent [messages and actions](#) that reinforce responsible fatherhood.

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### As a business...

- Connect with the Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnership to identify ways to support fathers and families by offering discounts on products that create opportunities for dads and families to connect with their children. Email [whpartnerships@who.eop.gov](mailto:whpartnerships@who.eop.gov).
- Support a culture – across all levels of your business – that reinforces the importance of time for family and children. This requires purposeful and consistent messages and actions that reinforce responsible fatherhood, as well as reviewing your business's policies regarding [workplace flexibility](#).

### As a non-government organization...

- Become a partner and [take the Fatherhood Pledge](#) to create opportunities for family and fathers to become involved with their children through ongoing activities and events.
- [Develop a formal responsible fatherhood program](#) through evidence-based strategies and resources found on the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse.
- Reach out to members of the President's [Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge](#), which is inviting institutions of higher education to commit to a year of interfaith and community service programming on campus.
- Visit the "[Grants and Resources](#)" page of the Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships to find opportunities to promote responsible fatherhood through a partnership with the federal government.

### As a place of worship...

- Download the [Faith-based and Neighborhood Organizations toolkit](#), which will point you to opportunities to form partnerships with Centers for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, as well as helpful information on how to apply for federal grants and access capacity building resources to support the great work that you are already doing.
- Reach out to members of the President's [Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge](#), which is inviting institutions of higher education to commit to a year of interfaith and community service programming on campus.
- Visit the "[Grants and Resources](#)" page of the Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships to find opportunities to promote responsible fatherhood through a partnership with the federal government.
- Follow the [Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships Blog](#) for up-to-date information about responsible fatherhood events and opportunities to get involved.

## PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD

### ENDNOTES

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<sup>15</sup> Christy A. Visher, Carly R. Knight, Aaron Chalfin, and John K. Roman. 2008. *The Impact of Marital and Relationship Status on Social Outcomes for Returning Prisoners*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.