

CHILD SUPPORT: BUILDING STRONGER FAMILY TIES

Strong families are the heart of our nation. The child support program helps empowers separated parents to improve their parenting and co-parenting skills, maintain stable family relationships, contribute to the emotional and financial well-being of their children, and strengthen family bonds. This begins with establishing paternity for children born out of wedlock.

Over 40% percent of all U.S. children are born of unmarried parents. Even if the biological fathers of these children are known to the mothers, neither the biological fathers nor the children have any rights to father-child relationships or benefits, until a legal father is established through a legally binding process, known as paternity establishment. Once a child has a legal father, the father has rights with respect to the child, and the child has rights to:

- Know his or her father;
- Know his or her heritage, and develop a sense of belonging;
- Have a medical history of both parents;
- Have access to medical coverage through one or both parents;
- Have a right to financial support of both parents;
- Become eligible for the father's veteran's and social security disability and death benefits; and
- Become eligible for family inheritances.

The core mission of the child support program is to locate parents, establish paternity, establish orders, and collect support; however, the federal government encourages innovation and collaboration with other programs. As a result, child support agencies work with public, private, and non-profit organizations, and/or offer help or resources to families in one or more of the following areas:

- Child Support Prevention: Preventing the need for child support through educational programs offered to children and parents;
- Family Violence Collaboration: Helping reduce the risk of family violence, and helping families pursue child support safely;
- Health Care Coverage: Assisting families in securing private or public health care programs;
- Healthy Family Relationships: Helping parents establish access and visitation with their children, and improving parental communication and skills;
- Economic Stability: Improving child support outcomes through employment programs; and
- Engaging Fathers from Birth: Helping fathers become involved in their children's lives.

