Parent Supports and Programs

A summary of the scientific literature on programs to support parents.



How This Impacts Children's Development

Parenting is one of the most emotionally powerful, demanding, and consequential tasks of adulthood. Children with engaged fathers have higher levels of cognitive skills and academic grades, more positive peer

relationships, and fewer behavior and mental health problems. Additionally, routine interactions between parents and children can support healthy development. This includes family meals which can boost children's health and wellbeing, reducing the likelihood that they'll become obese or use drugs, and increase the chances that they'll do well in school.

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Talking Points from the SRCD Briefs

- The percentage of children in first-marriage, two-parent families has declined, while more children are raised in single-parent, remarried two-parent, or cohabiting unmarried families.
- In 2015, 14.5 million children—almost 20% of all children in the U.S.—were living below the federal poverty threshold.
- Nearly 1 in 4 children (about 20 million) live in homes without a resident father, which increases the risk of social-emotional issues, academic failure, and involvement in the juvenile justice system.
- The 2006 Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) initiative aims to address issues related to fathers' absence, through Healthy Marriage (HM) and Responsible Fatherhood (RF) programs.
- Fatherhood programs that involve both parents improve father engagement, strengthen collaboration, support child development, and reduce harsh parenting.

Policy Considerations in the Briefs

1. Support policy approaches that:
    - Expand access to paid family and sick leave
    - Provide incentives for more predictable work hours for parents
    - Increase child tax credits and tax credits for low-income working families
    - Provide resources to help parents make informed choices about childcare
    - Foster a well-prepared and well-paid early care and education workforce as well as high-quality out-of-school programs
2. Greater support for family-level interventions, including targeting multiple aspects of parent's wellbeing, co-parenting, and employment challenges, could help improve child development outcomes.
    - Parenting interventions not culturally informed may not be as effective in engaging ethnic minority families.
    - Interventions that also connect families to community resources may provide additional needed support for multi-risk families.
    - These programs provide more intensive support for families facing specific challenges, such as a history of abuse, parental depression or divorce.
3. Integrate resources for families into their everyday lives to support parents in the settings they and their children participate in regularly.
4. The federal government should build on local initiatives that have launched marketing campaigns promoting the many benefits of healthy family mealtimes.
5. Families should be able to make nutritious and healthy food choices in every area of the country. This includes regulations from state and local governments and cities and communities.

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