



# National Child Care Information Center

*A service of the Child Care Bureau*

NCCIC

243 Church Street NW, 2nd Floor

Vienna, Virginia 22180

Phone: (800) 616-2242 Fax: (800) 716-2242 TTY: (800) 516-2242

World Wide Web: <http://nccic.org>

## MARRIAGE AND WELFARE REFORM

The following resources explore the goals of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) to encourage marriage and discourage out-of-wedlock births.

■ The Healthy Marriage Initiative sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), exists to help couples, who have chosen marriage for themselves, gain greater access to marriage education services, on a voluntary basis, where they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage. Additional Information is available on the Web at <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/healthymarriage/index.html>.

■ *Government Partnerships with Religious Groups to Promote and Support Healthy Marriages: Panel Discussion Transcript* (June 28, 2004), prepared by the Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy, an independent research project of the Rockefeller Institute of Government, discusses issues related to recent Federal and State strategies to promote and support healthy marriages. This resource is available on the Web at [http://www.religionandsocialpolicy.org/events/2004\\_june\\_forum/Healthy\\_Marriage\\_6-28-04\\_event\\_transcripts.pdf](http://www.religionandsocialpolicy.org/events/2004_june_forum/Healthy_Marriage_6-28-04_event_transcripts.pdf).

■ *Implementing Programs to Strengthen Unwed Parents' Relationships: Lessons from Family Connections in Alabama* (May 2004), prepared by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., for the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, describes and develops lessons learned from the Family Connections in Alabama (FCA) program that are relevant for designing and implementing Building Strong Families project (BSF) programs funded by the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It first describes the overall program design and planning, and then discusses implementation in each of the study sites, focusing on staffing, participant recruitment, curriculum, structure and content of classes, and receptivity of staff and participants to the program. The final chapter discusses implications for developing and operating relationship/marriage interventions with unwed couples—the BSF target population—and discusses how the lessons learned may apply to future BSF program design and content. Links to this resource are available on the Web at [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/imp\\_pro\\_unwed/imp\\_pro\\_unwed\\_title.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/imp_pro_unwed/imp_pro_unwed_title.html).

■ “What Do ‘I Do’s Do? Potential Benefits of Marriage for Cohabiting Couples with Children” (May 2004), *Policy Brief: New Federalism: National Survey of America’s Families B-59*, by Gregory Acs, and Sandi Nelson, for the Assessing the New Federalism project, published by Urban Institute, assesses the potential size of the intrinsic benefits that are assumed to accrue to couples that marry . They examine how much of the difference in well-being between children

in cohabiting and married couple families can be explained by differences in the characteristics of these families. Any remaining differences may be the result of the intrinsic benefits of marriage. The authors establish an upper bound of sorts for the potential benefits of promoting marriage among cohabiting families. They find that differences in characteristics explain 50 to 80 percent of the differences in child well-being between cohabiting and married families. Thus, if programs could successfully promote marriage among cohabiting couples with children, the authors would expect modest but non-negligible improvements in child well-being. This resource is available on the Web at <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=311001>

■ “Should We Get Married in the Morning? A Profile of Cohabiting Couples with Children” (March 2004), *Assessing the New Federalism Discussion Papers* No. 04-01, by Gregory Acs and Sandi Nelson, for the Assessing the New Federalism project, published by the Urban Institute, used data from the 2002 round of the National Survey of America’s Families (NSAF) to compare the characteristics of cohabiting families with children to those of married couples with children. It also used regression-based simulations to assess the extent to which the well-being of children in cohabiting families may improve if the cohabiting adults were to marry. They found that about two-thirds of the gap in poverty, low-income status, and food insecurity between cohabiting and married couple families could be accounted for solely by differences in the measured characteristics of these families. They concluded that successful marriage promotion efforts aimed at cohabiting parents could improve the outcomes for their children, but only to a limited extent. This resource is available on the Web at <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=310962>.

■ *Beyond Marriage Licenses: Efforts to Strengthen Marriage and Two-Parent Families. A State-by-State Snapshot* (2004), by Theodora Ooms, Stacey Bouchet, and Mary Parke, published by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), provides a State-by-State description of government-related activities in couples and marriage policy. It includes profiles of seven “high-activity” States and descriptions of at least \$90 million in recent Federal grants for marriage-related demonstration projects, technical assistance, and research and evaluation. This resource is available on the Web at [http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1082987634.24/beyond\\_marr.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1082987634.24/beyond_marr.pdf).

■ *Marriage-Related Provisions in Recent Welfare Reauthorization Proposals: A Summary* (March 2004), by Mary Parke, Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), offers background on marriage-promotion efforts within the context of welfare reform and describes provisions relating to marriage and family formation in House and Senate Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) reauthorization legislation in 2002 and 2003. It includes lists of allowable marriage-related and fatherhood activities in H.R. 4, the Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act of 2003. This resource is available on the Web at [http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1056725608.93/marr\\_prov\\_upd.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1056725608.93/marr_prov_upd.pdf).

■ “The Effects of Welfare and Child Support Policies on Union Formation” (December 2003), a *Fragile Families Research Brief* No. 20, by the Bendheim-Thoman Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, Princeton University Social Indicators Survey Center, Columbia University, uses new data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to examine how welfare and child support policies, as well as labor market conditions, affect family formation among unwed

couples in urban areas who gave birth in the late 1990s. They used baseline data from interviews at the child's birth and data from one-year follow-up interviews with 3,286 couples. They explored union formation decisions subsequent to a nonmarital birth: some parents chose to marry, while other parents remained unmarried and lived together, remained romantically involved but lived apart, or ended their relationship. This resource is available on the Web at <http://crw.princeton.edu/files/briefs/ResearchBrief20.pdf>.

■ *The Long-Term Effects of the Minnesota Family Investment Program on Marriage and Divorce among Two-Parent Families* (October 2003), by Lisa A. Gennetian, for the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), builds on findings from MFIP that showed higher rates of marriage among parents who participated in this initiative, which provided financial incentives to welfare recipients who worked. This report documents MFIP's long-term effects on marriage, divorce, and cohabitation among participants in the program's two-parent family sample of nearly 2,500 households. This resource is available on the Web at [www.mdrc.org/publications/357/abstract.html](http://www.mdrc.org/publications/357/abstract.html).

■ "State Policy Options for Supporting Healthy Marriages" (September 2003), *Issue Brief*, prepared by the National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices, offers policy options for States interested in expanding or initiating efforts to support healthy marriages. It reviews a range of options States have used to strengthen existing marriages, encourage and support new marriages, and educate the public about the benefits of marriage. This resource is available on the Web at <http://www.nga.org/cda/files/0401HEALTHYMARRIAGES.pdf>.

■ "Welfare Reform and Work and Marriage: The Way to End Poverty and Welfare" (September 2003), in *Welfare Reform & Beyond Policy Brief* No. 28, by Ron Haskins and Isabel Sawhill, published by the Brookings Institution, contrasts making cash and related forms of public assistance more generous with strategies that encourage work and marriage. The data suggest that the latter are more effective ways of reducing poverty and demonstrate the wisdom of the increasing attention that has been given to encouraging work and marriage in recent policy discussions. This resource is available on the Web at <http://www.brookings.edu/es/wrb/publications/pb/pb28.pdf>.

■ "Supporting Healthy Marriage and Strengthening Relationships of Unwed Parents: Technical Assistance Available" (August 2003), a *Building Strong Families Brief* No. 2, by Barbara Devaney, Alan Hershey, and Debra Strong, published by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., details the technical assistance services available to State and local organizations interested in developing services for unwed couples who are expecting or have just had a child. The project team can help organizations plan a program, select a curriculum on marriage and relationship skills, add other components of the program model, and provide guidance for implementation and operational issues. This resource is available on the Web at <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/bsfisbr2.pdf>.

■ "Are Married Parents Really Better for Children? What Research Says About the Effects of Family Structure on Child Well-Being" (May 2003), a *Couples and Marriage Series Brief* No. 3, by Mary Parke, published by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), summarizes the research on the effects of family structure on child well-being, discusses some of the

complexities of the research, and identifies issues that remain to be explored. This resource is available on the Web at

[http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1052841451.72/Marriage\\_Brief3.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1052841451.72/Marriage_Brief3.pdf).

■ *Increasing Marriage Will Dramatically Reduce Child Poverty* (May 2003), by Robert E. Rector, Kirk A. Johnson, Patrick F. Fagan, and Lauren R. Noyes, published by the Heritage Foundation, uses data from the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study to calculate how much marriage could reduce poverty among couples who are not married at the time of the child's birth. Specifically, the effect of marriage on poverty was calculated according to three separate scenarios relating to the mothers' employment after the child's birth. In each scenario, marriage reduced the probability that mothers would live in poverty by at least two-thirds. A key target group for this policy would be nonmarried mothers and fathers around the time of the child's birth. This resource is available on the Web at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Family/cda0306.cfm>.

■ "Strengthening Relationships and Supporting Healthy Marriage Among Unwed Parents" (April 2003), *Building Strong Families Brief* No. 1, by M. Robin Dion and Barbara Devaney, prepared by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., focuses on program design aspects of the conceptual framework for interventions with unmarried parents to help them strengthen their relationships and form and sustain healthy marriages. This resource is available on the Web at <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/BSFisbr1.pdf>.

■ *The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study; Baseline Report* (August 2001, revised March 2003), by Sara McLanahan, Irwin Garfinkel, Nancy Reichman, Julien Teitler, Marcia Carlson, and Christina Norland Audigier, for the Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, Princeton University, follows a new birth cohort of approximately 5,000 children and their parents in 20 cities across the United States in an effort to learn more about an important group of families in the United States: unmarried parents and their children. The term *fragile families* is used to underscore the fact that unmarried parents and their children are families, and to remind the reader that these families have a higher risk of poverty and family dissolution than traditional families. This resource is available on the Web at <http://crew.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies/nationalreport.pdf>.

■ *Helping Unwed Parents Build Strong and Healthy Marriages: A Conceptual Framework for Interventions* (January 2003), by M. Robin Dion, Barbara Devaney, Sheena McConnell, Melissa Ford, Heather Hill, and Pamela Winston, prepared by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., presents a conceptual framework for interventions that would address the needs and circumstances of unmarried parents and provide relationship skills instruction and knowledge for those who choose to form and sustain healthy marriages. It builds on research indicating that the period around the time of a child's birth may indicate a critical moment for strengthening couple bonds. The conceptual framework therefore focuses on designs for intervening with unwed parents just before or soon after the birth of a child. The conceptual framework is the product of several activities conducted in the Strengthening Families with Child Born Out of Wedlock study (Strengthening Families study). This resource is available on the Web at <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/helpingunwed.pdf>.

■ *Forum Proceedings: Marriage, Poverty and Child Well-Being* (December 5, 2002), Human Services Policy Center and the Center for Research on Families at the University of Washington, explores the implications of policies designed to support marriage and strengthen families. The presentations focused on two questions: “In very low-income families, do children benefit if their parents are married?” and “Can policy successfully promote marriage?” It includes the Bush administration’s perspective on providing supports for strengthening families and promoting marriage; information about how individual States have been implementing the Federal marriage-promotion policy; and data-based presentations on the relationships among policy, parental capabilities and relationships, and child well-being. This resource is available on the Web at [http://hspsc.org/conferences/marriage%20forum/marriage\\_forum\\_pro%20.pdf](http://hspsc.org/conferences/marriage%20forum/marriage_forum_pro%20.pdf).

■ *ACF Rapid Response Colorado: Strengthening Families Conference* (November 2002), by the Rapid Response Technical Assistance Project, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, describes a meeting where policy-makers from different community sectors Statewide came together to examine the socioeconomic factors affecting Colorado families and to identify strategies for addressing these questions. It provides information on research, best practices, and innovative collaboration strategies for supporting healthy families. This resource is available on the Web at [http://www.calib.com/peerta/policies/pdf/colorado\\_strength.pdf](http://www.calib.com/peerta/policies/pdf/colorado_strength.pdf).

■ *Developing a Marriage Initiative for Your State* (October 2002), by Nicole Waldman, for the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network, Office of Family Assistance, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, describes the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network workshop that was held in Oklahoma City on September 17–18, 2002. States that attended included Iowa, Georgia, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Utah. The purpose of the two-day workshop was to create an interactive dialogue with State policy-makers/administrators concerning their efforts and effective strategies to develop and implement marriage and healthy families initiatives. Specific topics covered during the workshop included utilizing survey data to develop a Statewide marriage initiative, components of a marriage curriculum, developing interagency partnerships, handling resistance and skepticism to marriage programs, and working with community partners to implement a marriage initiative. This resource is available on the Web at [http://www.calib.com/peerta/pdf/long\\_marriage.pdf](http://www.calib.com/peerta/pdf/long_marriage.pdf).

■ *More Than a Dating Service? State Activities Designed to Strengthen and Promote Marriage* (October 2002), by Mary Parke and Theodora Ooms, for the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), describes the wide range of activities underway in States to promote marriage and two-parent families. This resource is available on the Web at [http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1034879939.91/Marriage\\_Brief2.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1034879939.91/Marriage_Brief2.pdf).

■ *State Policies to Promote Marriage: Final Report* (September 2002), by Karen N. Gardiner, Michael E. Fishman, Plamen Nikolov, Asaph Glosser, and Stephanie Laud of the Lewin Group, with the assistance of Theodora Ooms, submitted by the Lewin Group to the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, studied the status of policies to support and promote marriage at the State level. It

inventories marriage policies in 10 broad areas that were enacted and proposed in the 50 States and District of Columbia both prior to the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) and after the law's passage. This resource is available on the Web at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/marriage02f/>.

■ *Marriage and Government: Strange Bedfellows?* (August 2002), by Theodora Ooms, for the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), explores the question of what the legitimate role of government in promoting marriage might be, outlines some of the objections to government intervention in marriage, discusses the relationship between marriage and poverty, and offers a framework for a reasonable Marriage-Plus approach that focuses on promoting child well-being. This resource is available on the Web at

[http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1028563059.86/Marriage\\_Brief1.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1028563059.86/Marriage_Brief1.pdf).

■ “Marriage from a Child’s Perspective: How Does Family Structure Affect Children, and What Can We Do about It?” (June 2002), a *Child Trends Research Brief*, produced by Child Trends Inc., reviews the research evidence on the effects of family structure on children, as well as key trends in family structure over the last few decades. It notes that an extensive body of research shows that children do best when they grow up with both biological parents in a low-conflict marriage; however, research on how to promote strong, low-conflict marriages is thin at best. This brief also discusses promising strategies for reducing births outside of marriage and promoting strong, stable marriages. This resource is available on the Web at

<http://www.childtrends.org/Files/MarriageRB602.pdf>.

■ “Should Government Promote Healthy Marriages?” (May 2002) *Short Takes on Welfare Policy* No. 5, from *Assessing the New Federalism*, a project of the Urban Institute, looks at the issues around government programs that promote healthy marriages for families in poverty. This resource is available on the Web at [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/ShortTakes\\_5.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/ShortTakes_5.pdf).

■ “Assessing the Relationship between Welfare Policies and Changes in Living Arrangements of Low-Income Families and Children in the Late 1990s” (March 2002), a *Discussion Paper*, by Gregory Acs and Sandi Nelson, prepared for the Urban Institute, uses data from the 1997 and 1999 National Surveys of America’s Families to examine the impact of State welfare policies and practices on the living arrangements of low-income families with children. Results from a multivariate “difference-in-difference-in-differences” model suggest that more effective collection of child support and family cap policies are correlated with declines in single parenting and increases in dual parenting. Other policies such as earned income tax credits and welfare policies such as sanctions, two-parent welfare eligibility rules, and stepparent income deeming rules have no clear consistent association with living arrangements. This resource is available on the Web at <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/310444.pdf>.

■ “Fragile Families, Welfare Reform, and Marriage” (November 2001), *Welfare Reform & Beyond Policy Brief* No. 10, by Sara McLanahan, Irwin Garfinkel, and Ronald B. Mincy, published by the Brookings Institution, assesses “marriage” and “marriageability” strategies and discusses policies to promote both. Strategies for increasing father involvement and improving communication among parents who live apart are also considered. This resource is available on the Web at

<http://www.brook.edu/es/research/projects/wrb/publications/pb/pb10.htm>.

■ *Welfare Reform: More Research Needed on TANF Family Caps and Other Policies for Reducing Out-Of-Wedlock Births* (September 11, 2001) (GAO-01-924), published by the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO), examines existing research on efforts by States to reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies among welfare recipients by imposing family caps on welfare benefits. This resource is available on the Web at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d01924.pdf>.

■ *Reducing Non-Marital Births, Welfare Reform & Beyond Policy Brief No. 5* (August 2001), by Paul Offner, published by the Brookings Institution, examines why nonmarital births happen, the effort States have made to address the problem, and what additional steps could be taken to reduce non-marital births when Congress reauthorizes welfare reform legislation. This resource is available on the Web at <http://www.brook.edu/es/research/projects/wrb/publications/pb/pb05.htm>.

■ “Wedding Bell Blues: Marriage and Welfare Reform” (Summer 2001), in *Brookings Review* Vol. 9, No. 3, by Wade Horn, published by the Brookings Institution, explores the lack of progress in reducing out-of-wedlock childbearing and promoting stable two-parent, married households since the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was introduced in 1996. It also discusses States’ efforts to encourage marriage as one way to reduce welfare dependency. This resource is available on the Web at <http://www.brookings.edu/press/REVIEW/summer2001/horn.htm>.

■ *Data Needs for Measuring Family and Fertility Change After Welfare Reform* (June 2001), ed, Douglas J. Besharov, prepared for the Committee to Review Welfare Reform Research, a project of the Welfare Reform Academy, Maryland School of Public Affairs, assesses data sources on births, marriages, divorce, and abortion for welfare reform evaluation. This resource is available on the Web at <http://welfareacademy.org/pubs/dataneeds/dataneeds.pdf>.

■ “Welfare Recipients’ Attitudes toward Welfare, Nonmarital Childbearing, and Work: Implications for Reform?” (June 2001), a *New Federalism: National Survey of America’s Families Child Trends Brief Series B*, No. B-37, by Richard Wertheimer, Melissa Long, and Sharon Vandivere, by the Urban Institute, explores how attitudes toward welfare, nonmarital childbearing, and work differ between mothers who have recently received welfare payments and mothers who have not recently received welfare. This resource is available on the Web at [http://newfederalism.urban.org/html/series\\_b/b37/b37.html](http://newfederalism.urban.org/html/series_b/b37/b37.html).

■ “Births Outside of Marriage: Perceptions vs. Reality” (April 2001), a *Child Trends Research Brief*, by Elizabeth Terry-Humen, Jennifer Manlove, and Kristin A. Moore, produced by Child Trends Inc., describes specific characteristics of the women who have births outside of marriage. This resource is available on the Web at [http://www.childtrends.org/files/rb\\_032601.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/files/rb_032601.pdf).

■ *Encouraging Marriage and Discouraging Divorce* (March 21, 2001), by the Heritage Foundation, notes that States are able to use a portion of their Federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) surplus funds—which accumulate under the formula grant as they reduce their welfare rolls—on programs that strengthen marriage and reduce divorce among the poor. It explores how States have begun to find ways to implement this mandate or to take steps of their own to strengthen marriage, and gives public policy implications. This resource is available on the Web at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Family/BG1421.cfm>.

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