

The intent of Responsible Fatherhood is to strengthen the relationship between fathers and their children so that children benefit from the active, positive engagement of both parents. Children deserve to have two parents care and support them and be actively involved in their lives. NASW, Iowa chapter's policy statement on responsible fatherhood is available at <http://www.iowanasw.org> for review.

At the Iowa PACE "Legislative Day", Ms. Kara Hudson provided a brief overview of responsible fatherhood. As a result of her presentation, NASW, Iowa chapter received feedback reflecting several questions and concerns. Questions and concerns focused on single mothers, whether responsible fatherhood was consistent with social work values and ethics, same-sex couples parenting children, homosexuality rights and equality, and sources of statistical information presented. To address these questions and concerns and to provide more detailed information on responsible fatherhood, the following talking points are presented.

Responsible Fatherhood and Single Mothers

- ❖ When a father exists, responsible fatherhood encourages fathers to be positively, actively involved with their children, unless the father poses a safety risk to the child or mother, such as in cases of child abuse, neglect, or domestic violence.
- ❖ Responsible fatherhood supports single mothers by encouraging fathers to establish paternity, to support their children financially, to be actively involved in their children's lives, and to co-parent with their children's mother. When fathers act responsibly, they relieve some of the stress single mother's face in raising their children.

Responsible Fatherhood and Domestic Violence

- ❖ Responsible fatherhood does not encourage or condone domestic violence. In fact, the use of the word "responsible" stresses fathers should act in a responsible manner not only towards their child but also towards the child's other parent.
- ❖ Responsible fatherhood acknowledges some fathers are domestically violent.
- ❖ Responsible fatherhood advocates insist that domestic violence must be addressed while acknowledging that domestic violence is not their area of expertise. As a result, responsible fatherhood programs refer men to appropriate social service programs to address domestically violent behavior.
- ❖ Responsible fatherhood programs encourage men to comply with protection orders and established protocols to protect their victim and children. A group in Toronto, Canada developed a fatherhood curricula, *Caring Dads*, to show domestically violent fathers how their actions affect their children and their children's development.

Responsible Fatherhood and Child Welfare

- ❖ The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS) issued a manual for child welfare workers entitled, *The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children*, available at <http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/fatherhood.pdf>, which provides guidance for workers for father inclusion within all phases of child welfare, from assessment to case closure.
- ❖ The USDHHS also commissioned two studies to evaluate father and paternal kin inclusion within child welfare systems among four representative states. Results indicated child welfare workers needed to include fathers and paternal kin more and that many fathers are either appropriate placements for their children in lieu of foster care or can provide support to the mother and child. These studies, *What About the Dads? Child Welfare Agencies' Efforts to Identify, Locate, and Involve Nonresident Fathers and More about the Dads: Exploring Associations between Nonresident Father Involvement and Child Welfare Case Outcomes*, are available at <http://www.aspe.hhs.gov/ /topic/subtopic.cfm?subtopic=325>.
- ❖ The National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System conducted a literature review on responsible fatherhood. They are conducting four responsible fatherhood pilot projects within child welfare across the U.S.
- ❖ The Iowa Department of Human Services (IDHS) authored a legislative report regarding how it plans to support responsible fatherhood within its programs and services. *Options and Resources Needed to Support Responsible Fatherhood* is available at <http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/docs/2007OptionsReport.pdf>.

Responsible Fatherhood and Social Work Values and Ethics

Social Work Value	Social Work Ethic	Responsible Fatherhood
Service	To help people in need and address social problems	Assist parents in raising their children through responsible fathering. One avenue to address social problems such as high school dropouts, teenage pregnancy, and juvenile crime.
Social Justice	To challenge social injustice	Assist fathers in changing systems that diminish their role as parents.
Dignity and Worth of the Person	To respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person	Affirms the worth and value of fathers in the lives of their children. Acknowledges the unique contributions fathering makes in the development of children.
Importance of Human Relationships	To recognize the central importance of human relationships	Strengthens the relationships between fathers and their children by recognizing the importance of the father-child relationship and supporting its development. Strengthens the relationship between parents of children through effective co-parenting so that children benefit from two actively engaged parents.

Source: NASW Code of Ethics, available at <http://www.socialworkers.org>, pages 5-6.

Responsible Fatherhood, Same-Sex Couples, and Homosexual Rights & Equality

- ❖ Responsible fatherhood does not advocate or promote a particular family structure or a particular sexuality.
- ❖ In same-sex family structures, responsible fatherhood is not applicable unless a father exists. For example, lesbian couples may utilize a sperm bank, may adopt, or may ask a male friend to father the couple’s child. If the couple utilizes a sperm bank or adopts a child, there is no father to the child. However, if the couple utilizes a male friend, the couple and the male friend determine what, if any, relationship the man has with the child. This also would be similar for a male couple who utilizes a surrogate mother to produce a child. The couple and the surrogate would determine the extent of the surrogate’s relationship with the child.
- ❖ If same-sex couples have children from previous relationships where a father exists, responsible fatherhood encourages the father to be actively engaged in the child’s life unless there is a safety risk to the child or other parent.
- ❖ The use of “social fathers” for children who have no father, whether due to same-sex family structure, father absence due to incarceration, safety issues, inability to parent, or death is debatable. Social fathers are men who act as father figures to children, such as grandfathers, uncles, nephews, neighbors, etc. NASW, Iowa Chapter does not take a position on the use of social fathers.

Responsible Fatherhood: Why Social Workers Should Support It

- ❖ According to the National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System's literature review, millions of U.S. children are living without their biological fathers.
- ❖ Social science research notes higher rates of drop-outs, teenage pregnancy, and juvenile crime among children with non-residential or non-participatory fathers. (Please refer to NASW-Iowa Chapter Responsible Fatherhood policy statement.)
- ❖ Children benefit from the active, positive participation of two parents in their lives.
- ❖ Responsible fatherhood supports both mothers and fathers in their role as parents.
- ❖ Responsible fatherhood is consistent with social work values and ethics.

Responsible Fatherhood Resources

Annie E. Casey Foundation: <http://www.aecf.org/>

Child Welfare Information Gateway: <http://www.childwelfare.gov/>

Child Welfare League of America: <http://www.cwla.org/>

Iowa Department of Human Services Fatherhood web site:
http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/Consumers/Child_Support/Fatherhood/Home.html

National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues: <http://www.abanet.org/child/rciji>

National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System:
<http://www.fatherhoodqic.org>

National Fatherhood Initiative: <http://www.fatherhood.org/>

National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse – <http://www.fatherhood.gov>

National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning:
<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/>

University of Pennsylvania (National Center on Fathers and Families): <http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu/>

Urban Institute: <http://www.urban.org/>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/index.shtml>

Sources of statistical information presented at Legislative Day:

Fatherless homes statistics – Polk County Fathers and Families Coalition, 2009, Annual Report, available at <http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/docs/2009Coalitionannualrepfinal.pdf>.

Interagency Work Group on Responsible Parenthood. (December 2000). *Responsible Parenthood: Taking Care of Our Children: Building the Case in Iowa, A Report to Governor Thomas J. Vilsack*, available at: <http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/docs/2000WorkgroupReport.pdf>

Popenoe, D. (1996). *Life Without Father*. New York, NE: Martin Kesler Books / The Free Press.

Poverty statistics – U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, 2007 American Community Survey, Iowa, available at http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=04000US19&-qr_name=ACS_2007_3YR_G00_DP3YR3&-ds_name=ACS_2007_3YR_G00_-lang=en&-sse=on