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Quick Facts: Family Centered Child Support Services

This Quick Facts guide provides information about initiatives through the child support program centered on families.

The Child Support Program¹ is a successful federal-state-tribal partnership that seeks to promote economic stability for children whose parents live apart. The program collects \$4.73 for every \$1 in public funds invested. In FY 2022, \$32 billion was collected in 12.3 million cases for 12.8 million children.²

Throughout the nation, Child Support programs have recognized the need to provide services that promote right-sized orders, reduce arrears -- especially those owed to the states, and allow agencies to get involved early when child support orders are not being paid. To achieve this focus, several state and county programs have implemented the following best practices and programs:

- **Alternative Solutions** – Provide referrals to various organizations that assist parents with overcoming barriers that hinder them from becoming self-reliant. Provide referrals to partnered organizations for job training and/or placement services.
- **Prisoner/Re-Entry Programs** – Assist in educating incarcerated parents about child support modifications as well as lifting license restrictions on parents soon to be released.
- **National Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED)** – A six-year demonstration program launched in 2012 that provided case management services, employment, parenting education, financial stability, relationship building, and economic sustainability.
- **Access & Visitation Programs** – Provide referral sources to parents to establish visitation (parenting) plans.
- **Arrears Management Programs** – Provide forgiveness of state-owed arrears upon meeting specifically outlined requirements.
- **Promote Family Reunification** – Reduce or end referrals of foster care cases for child support collection.
- **Family-First Distribution** – Prioritize sending assigned arrears collections to families instead of government to help lift families out of poverty.

¹ Created by Title IV-D of the Social Security Act.

² [Office of Child Support Enforcement \(OCSS\) FY 2022 Preliminary Report.](#)





- Digital Marketing – A 24-month demonstration project that allowed states to test digital marketing approaches to better reach parents that could benefit from child support services. Online applications, simplified and mobile-friendly websites, and direct messages were the biggest takeaways for best digital practices from these grantees.
- Fatherhood Initiatives – Assist the parent owing support in removing barriers that prevent the parent from meeting their court ordered child support and increasing their involvement in their children’s lives.
- Parenting Time Credit – Provide encouragement of parenting plans to ensure right-sized orders and to promote parental involvement.

The federal rule that took effect in January 2017, entitled *Flexibility, Efficiency, and Modernization in Child Support Enforcement Programs*, facilitates many of the family-centered child support services in place at the state and county level.³ The rule mandates that child support orders are set based on a parent’s income or other evidence of ability to pay and discourages across-the-board imputation of income absent evidence that supports the order. The rule also disallows treating incarceration as voluntary unemployment and encourages agencies to initiate a review of orders where parents are incarcerated, to prevent arrears building up during incarceration. Finally, the rule requires that the use of civil contempt to enforce collection of child support complies with due process and is reserved for payers who are able to pay but choose not to, rather than for payers who are truly unable to meet their obligation.

The rule reflects a move away from the original program mission to recover welfare costs, and away from the use of more traditional, coercive enforcement methods, and places more of an emphasis on family-centered child support services.

³<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/css/grants/current-grants/digitalmarketing>

⁶81 FR 93492, December 20, 2016.

