

Quick Facts: Parenting Time

This Quick Facts guide provides information about the relationship between parenting time and child support.

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

Parenting time is defined as the amount of time a child spends with each parent as specified in a parenting plan or court order. While child support and parenting time are separate rights usually governed by different state statutes, research shows emotional support and financial support are interrelated. Parents obligated to pay child support are more likely to stay involved in their children's lives and meet their financial responsibilities when parenting time arrangements are established.

Married parents ending their relationship typically address parenting time as part of the divorce process. However, on average, 40 percent of births in the United States are to unmarried mothers.³ Unmarried parents generally do not have a systematic avenue for resolving parenting time concerns.

Along these lines, the federal Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) has assisted states with grant opportunities facilitating parenting time agreements. Since the 1990's, the Access and Visitation Grant program provides \$10 million annually divided among the states to administer programs that promote paying parents' access to their children. While these grants complement the financial focus of child support enforcement, the funding stream for these grants has been frozen at the same amount since 1997 and does not fill the financial need for parenting time services.⁴

Increased national attention to this issue resulted in an OCSS demonstration grant. In 2012, the federal Parenting Time Opportunities for Children (PTOC) grant was offered as a five-site multi-year pilot grant to focus on developing strategies for establishing parenting time orders at the same time as initial child support orders.

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

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

³ <https://www.mathematica.org/publications/coordinating-parenting-time-and-child-support-experiences-and-lessons-learned-from-three-states>

⁴ <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/private/pdf/263506/Child-Support-Parenting-Time-Brief.pdf>





In September 2014, Congress enacted the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act⁵ that included a Sense of Congress (Section 303) expressing the “important goal” of incorporating parenting time with strong family violence safeguards in child support orders. However, this Act also directed that “states should use existing funding sources to support the establishment of parenting time arrangements.” PTOC grant recipients included family violence safeguards in site protocols.

In October 2019, OCSS published a research brief⁶ that summarized grant findings. PTOC demonstrated that child support agencies can incorporate parenting time orders in the child support establishment process. Evaluators of the PTOC sites confirmed that parents appreciated the opportunity to address parenting time along with establishing the child support order.

Also in 2020, the NCSEA Board of Directors adopted a Resolution for Support of Establishing Parenting Time Orders urging Congress to enact legislation that increases the Access and Visitation grant funding and make the establishment of parenting time orders an allowable activity for child support expenditures.⁷

The PARENTS (Providing Adequate Resources to Enhance Needed Time with Sons and Daughters) Act of 2021⁸ was passed by the U.S. Senate in July 2021. While many states did not, or could not, use existing funding to assist with parenting time as stipulated in the 2014 Act, S. 503 allows federal incentive money to be used for that purpose. State IV-D programs are allowed to expend their incentive funds on certain parenting time-related activities without the need to apply for and receive an OCSS exemption thus facilitating access to these funds for the agency. Specifically, these funds can be used to “develop, implement, and evaluate procedures” for establishing a parenting time agreement concurrently with an initial or modified child support order or medical support order. Allowable uses of these funds includes procedures to carry out parenting time agreements made prior to the establishment or modification of support orders. Incentive funds are only available (without an exemption) for agreements not contested by either parent.

Examples of State Programs

While most states have an adjustment in the child support guidelines for parenting time, some states have developed resources to address child support and parenting time issues simultaneously. This quick facts paper is not representative of how all state child support programs address parenting time, but it does highlight ways in which states are integrating their approaches to parenting time guidelines, order establishment, enforcement, and funding. Examples of parenting time initiatives include:

- Oregon participated in the PTOC grant. Oregon’s child support guidelines include a parenting time credit when there is a written parenting time agreement or court order providing for parenting time. The Oregon Child Support Program provides an online

⁵ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/house-bill/4980>

⁶ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/css/resource/parenting-time-opportunities-for-children>

⁷ [Resolution-Establishing-Parenting-Time-Orders December-2020.pdf \(ncsea.org\)](https://www.ncsea.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Resolution-Establishing-Parenting-Time-Orders-December-2020.pdf)

⁸ <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11744>





parenting time calculator to help parents determine the average time a child spends with each parent, which can be transferred into the child support calculator. In partnership between the Oregon Child Support Program and the Oregon Judicial Department, PTOC grant funds were used to develop an interactive interview tool to create a detailed parenting plan that can be used to obtain a court-ordered plan.

- Indiana participated in the PTOC grant and uses Access and Visitation federal grant funds to run a statewide parenting helpline housed in the state's child support program. Indiana's Parenting Time HelpLine is staffed by attorneys who are available to provide legal education, information, and resources regarding establishing, enforcing, and modifying parenting time orders. Indiana routinely addresses parenting time as required in dissolution matters, and in paternity matters when the parents agree on a parenting time plan. In addition to the HelpLine, services can be accessed through the Parenting Time HelpLine website⁹.
- To encourage frequent contact between a child and each parent, Florida passed legislation in 2017 allowing agreed-upon parenting time plans to be incorporated by reference into administrative final order for paternity or child support and judicial enforcement orders. The Florida Dept. of Revenue - Parenting Time Plans website¹⁰ provides access to the legislation and a list of the criteria to be met for the program to send a parenting time plan with the administrative support or modification action to the parents.
- The Michigan Parenting Time Guideline publication¹¹ is a resource for both parents and professionals. This document includes best practices for when to use the guidelines, child development and parenting time considerations, safety concerns, sample parenting time schedules, and where to locate parenting time assistance.

By supporting parenting time services, child support programs help bridge the gap between emotional support and financial support, which translates to improved child well-being.

⁹ <https://www.in.gov/dcs/child-support/parenting-time-hotline/>

¹⁰ https://floridarevenue.com/childsupport/parenting_time_plans/Pages/default.aspx

¹¹ https://www.courts.michigan.gov/siteassets/court-administration/standardsguidelines/foc/pt_gdlns.pdf?404%3bhttps%3a%2f%2fmisc01mstru25qprod_f159%3a80%2fAdministration%2fSCAO%2fOfficesPrograms%2fOC%2fDocuments%2fpt_gdlns.pdf=&r=1

