



To: Texas Judges Who Hear CPS Cases
From: The Honorable Robin Sage, (ret.)
Jurist in Residence, Office of Court Administration
Date: March 22, 2013
RE: Department of Family and Protective Services publishes guide for fathers in CPS cases

To better serve families by engaging fathers and keeping them involved in their children's lives, CPS has published a small, 18-page pamphlet called **The Father's Toolkit, A Guide to Navigating Child Protective Services**. The pamphlet (which is attached in a pdf version) is a straightforward guide that explains how CPS works, the rights of fathers, and advice on how to navigate the system. It also provides fathers tips on how to handle themselves. For example, there is advice on how to dress and act in court. There's also a short dictionary of child welfare terms and tips from fathers who have been personally involved in a CPS case. For copies of the brochure, contact your regional DFPS office or email Kenneth Thompson, the fatherhood specialist with DFPS, at: Kenneth.Thompson@dfps.state.tx.us.

More than 24 million U.S. children live apart from their biological fathers, according to 2011 U.S. Census Bureau data. That is 1 out of every 3 (33%) children in America. Nearly 2 in 3 (64%) African American children live in father-absent homes. One in three (34%) Hispanic children, and 1 in 4 (25%) white children live in father-absent homes. In 1960, only 11% of children lived in father-absent homes. Studies show that the absence of fathers directly contributes to crime and delinquency, emotional and behavior problems, poor educational performance, increased drug abuse, and even higher risks of suicide. One 2010 study showed that in many cases, the absence of a biological father in the home contributes to an increased risk of child maltreatment. CPS's [Texas Fatherhood Initiative](#) seeks to raise awareness about the importance of involving non-resident fathers in CPS cases as well as finding ways to provide them more services in their communities. [Click here to view this and other studies on The National Fatherhood Initiative's website](#). Research indicates that when non-resident fathers become involved in their children's CPS case, the children go home with their father 20 percent of the time.

What can judges do?

As judges, we need to be asking about fathers ourselves and urging caseworkers to locate them and involve them in their children's lives. If fathers themselves cannot be involved, then the father's family may be a resource. Just because a father may not be in a position to be a resource for his children does not mean his whole family is in the same predicament. According to Kenneth Thompson, paternal family members, especially paternal grandmothers, will often become helpful resources when they become aware that children related to them are in foster care. The following tips are taken from Texas Fatherhood Initiative materials:

- Don't focus on child safety without concern for fathers.
- Help fathers improve their parenting skills.
- Don't call on fathers only as a last resort.
- Make a diligent effort to find fathers because mothers don't always give information on where to find fathers.

- Consider the father and his family as well as the mother's family when looking for a safe place for a child to live.
- Follow-up with fathers consistently about the services CPS offers children.
- Support fathers who are battling addiction.
- Seek input from fathers before making decisions about children in a CPS case.