



**m** DEPARTMENT OF  
HUMAN SERVICES

 **PATHS TO  
PARENTHOOD**

for youth and young adults who have faced adverse  
circumstances or are justice-involved

**Report One**

**Apr 25, 2024**

## Paths to Parenthood

### Background

Parenthood is a tremendous gift and a tremendous responsibility, and can be particularly challenging for those who become parents at a young age. **Paths To Parenthood** was developed with these young people in mind, with a goal of setting them up for a successful start to their journey as parents.

Supported with funding from the Office of Child Support Services, the Minnesota **Paths to Parenthood** program was developed to educate young people on the responsibilities and obligations involved with parenthood and to support them and their decision making before they become parents.

The program is designed for both young people who are already parents and those who are not yet parents. It is focused on youth and young adults aged 16 to 25 who are incarcerated, involved in the criminal justice system, or are facing adverse or traumatic circumstances that may increase likelihood of becoming involved with the criminal justice system.

To inform curriculum development, child support staff collaborated with several local nonprofit organizations, including Lutheran Social Services, Ujamaa Place, and West Central Minnesota Communities Action, to convene focus groups with community members to gather their perspectives on the subject matter. In addition, this curriculum has drawn heavily from curriculum created in other states, including the Parenting and Paternity Awareness (p.a.p.a.) curriculum from Texas.

Paths To Parenthood was developed by the Child Support Division (CSD) at the Minnesota Department of Human Services and draws on expertise from within Minnesota's Child Support Program, Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC), and University of Minnesota's Prevention Research Center. Local community partners with expertise in child support services were invited to provide feedback on the curriculum during the development process. These community experts reviewed the curriculum and videos, contributed content, and gave specific recommendations for how the curriculum could be improved. These suggestions were incorporated into the curriculum.

### Program Overview

The **Paths to Parenthood** curriculum is intended to provide information on both the financial aspects and responsibilities of parenthood and provide an atmosphere that creates thoughtful reflection on what parenthood means to participants and what it means to be a responsible parent.

The curriculum includes nine lessons that cover topics such as the costs of parenthood, the Minnesota child support system, relationship and sexual readiness skills, individual and historical trauma, and resilience. The program was designed to be delivered to small groups of 10-12 participants in community-based settings, by educators with existing relationships with program participants.

## Minnesota Child Support Division, MN Department of Human Services

Program staff in CSD work to promote the well-being of children and self-sufficiency of families by delivering quality child support services. CSD staff work closely with custodial and noncustodial parents. Through this process, staff gain insight into what people might have learned before becoming a parent and the challenges they face once they become parents.

Many of the young people for whom this program was designed (those who have experienced adverse circumstances that might increase likelihood of justice involvement) have experienced complex trauma. **Paths to Parenthood** is designed to help participants reflect on how their own histories and past trauma may influence their decision to become a parent. **Paths to Parenthood** strives to provide an opportunity to reflect on if and when parenthood is right for them for young people that may otherwise not have the space to do so.

**Paths to Parenthood** is unique compared to other school or community-based programs because it focuses on the legal aspects of paternity establishment; the rights and responsibilities of custodial and noncustodial parents; the costs of raising a child, including child support obligations; and the elements of a respectful relationship.

### Curriculum Development

**Paths to Parenthood** incorporates key principles from several disciplines and fields. For example, some of the curriculum developers of this project have experience in restorative justice. While it is not a restorative justice manual, the curriculum draws on principles found in various restorative justice methods. For example, the curriculum activities are designed to create a dialog between the facilitator and participants, as opposed to a one-way delivery of information by the facilitator. This approach reflects the belief that people can have fruitful discussions about hard topics and make good decisions for themselves. The activities and questions in this curriculum also recognize that justice-involved youth will either remain or return to the community, so activities and questions are designed to help participants reflect on possible points of transition in their lives.

Tailoring the curriculum to the needs and desires of the audience was an important value in creating this curriculum. In support of the curriculum development process for Cohort 1 of the **MN Paths to Parenthood** grant, CSD started a project, in partnership with community agencies, to talk directly to potential curriculum participants and the professionals who serve them. CSD asked participants and professional staff questions related to learning styles, knowledge of child support, responsible parenting, and financial literacy. CSD conducted focus groups, individual interviews, and surveys with target audiences, and interviewed professional staff. CSD also asked for suggestions for what potential participants and professional staff want to see in a responsible parenting curriculum. To date, partners have included: Ujamaa Place, West Central Minnesota Community Agency, Goodwill Easter Seals and Lutheran Social Services.

To gain perspectives of those incarcerated in DOC facilities, facilitators relied on self-assessment data collected by DOC and analyzed by University of Minnesota researchers in the publication, [Understanding the Needs and Programmatic Interests of Incarcerated Parents - Findings from a Prison Needs Assessment](#).

These themes informed the development of **Paths to Parenthood**:

- In the DOC self-assessment, respondents indicated their parenthood status and identified topics they might need while in prison and what they might need to reduce their likelihood of reoffending; this information was used to guide the development of the curriculum.
- CSD asked the youth and young adults how important it is to feel like their identities and cultural values are reflected in the curriculum. Many said when it comes to parenting, they want to hear from people who share similar identities, community, and cultural values. However, when learning about topics such as financial literacy, they said it is most important to hear from people with credibility and expertise.
- This audience had many questions about how to be a good parent or stepparent and how child support worked.
- Storytelling and music were important to the audience as ways of creating trust between facilitators and program participants; the curriculum tries to incorporate activities and videos relying on these methods. In addition, this group identified the importance of visual and kinesthetic activities, when possible.
- In the audience analysis focus groups, participants often said that a responsible parent was “caring.” However, they often had a difficult time describing what that meant. Curriculum materials and discussions are designed to encourage deeper reflection around these topics.

## **Program Learning and Reflection Objectives**

This curriculum is intended to provide information on both the financial aspects and responsibilities of parenthood and provide an atmosphere that creates thoughtful reflection on what parenthood means to participants and what it means to be a responsible parent.

While the curriculum does impart concrete information, it also seeks to make participants more aware and open up possibilities about one of life’s biggest decisions.

- Participants who are not yet parents can better identify the key things they should consider before becoming a parent.
- Participants increase their knowledge regarding the costs associated with parenthood.
- Participants increase their knowledge of the legal obligations associated with parenthood.
- Participants are more likely to value the importance of both parents’ legal, financial, and social involvement.
- Participants can articulate their own perspectives on what it means to be a responsible parent.
- Participants can articulate how their current or past situations (e.g., trauma, criminal justice involvement) may influence their approach to parenthood.
- Participants' motivation to sequence parenthood in the context of overall life goals and stability increases.

In addition to these overall learning objectives, the guide includes key concepts and reflection questions for each lesson in this project.

## Curriculum delivery

The program was designed to be delivered to small groups of 10-12 participants in community-based settings. Facilitators can deliver this curriculum in a variety of settings. The curriculum offers guidance for in-person and virtual delivery. The current life circumstances for those who are incarcerated and those who are in the community are different, and the guide includes questions and options that facilitators may consider based on the needs of the audience. Facilitators may modify as appropriate.

## Overview of lessons/modules

Session 1: Getting Started

Session 2: What does it cost to raise a child?

Session 3: What is paternity and parentage?

Session 4: How does child support work?

Session 5: What do I want for myself? Who is in my village?

Session 6: Partner relationships and sexual readiness

Session 7: Coercive relationships and individual trauma

Session 8: Historical trauma and resilience

Session 9: Stepping stones

Session 10: Celebration (optional)

## Paths to Parenthood Partners

### *Key Partners in the Paths to Parenthood Program*

The University of Minnesota's [Healthy Youth Development - Prevention Research Center](#) (PRC) is primarily responsible for evaluating the project. The PRC is one of a network of 26 academic research centers funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that link science to practice through community engagement. They develop, evaluate, disseminate, and apply evidence-based practices in Healthy Youth Development. Through published research, they expand the field's evidence and understanding of diverse young people's lived experience. They share innovations and promote best practices and policies by partnering with youth-serving adults in government agencies, nonprofits, schools and community organizations.

### *Implementation Partners*

[ANEW Chemical Health Services](#) guides women to and through recovery by keeping them accountable to their goals. According to their mission, they "lift women out of addiction and into recovery." Their residential and outpatient treatment programs are run by professionals with extensive knowledge in providing trauma-responsive treatment services. They believe women can achieve and maintain recovery by providing a safe place to call home while offering holistic treatment services and recovery resources.

[The Global Fatherhood Foundation](#) (GFF) is a lifetime advocate and mentor program whose passion is to empower men, especially those in immigrant communities, to have a voice and speak out on issues that impact their role as fathers. GFF encourages fathers to enroll in a responsible fatherhood program and to maintain participation through learning to be a better father and parent. GFF focuses on fathers who have been left out historically from communities, government, international agencies and market strategies traditionally geared toward women's causes and initiatives.

[Al-Maa'uun](#) is a recovery community service provider whose mission is to alleviate the ill-effects of substance abuse through direct service programs, advocacy and beyond. They strive to alleviate poverty and oppression within Black and other communities of color in North Minneapolis and surrounding areas. Their programming aims to serve the needs of their neighbors by filling gaps in housing, food security, career services, and community reintegration.

## Curriculum Evaluation

The goal of the **Paths to Parenthood** project is to make a tested curriculum available to any organization that might use it. During the pilot phase, the University of Minnesota Prevention Research Center will capture evaluation data that both informs revisions to the curriculum, as well as document changes in participants' knowledge about the financial, legal, and emotional responsibilities of parenthood, and attitudes and intentions related to parenthood. The evaluation will use a non-experimental design to collect data from program participants and will solicit feedback from program facilitators regarding the feasibility, useability, and acceptability of the curriculum. Participants will complete both a pre- and post-test survey, as well as short feedback surveys at the end of each session. Facilitators will complete a post-training survey after the initial training and a fidelity monitoring form after completing each session. The final session survey includes more questions about the overall implementation.

Key implementation questions include:

- How many individuals participated in the program?
- Do program participants find the lessons acceptable?
- Were program participants satisfied with the program?
- Were program participants engaged with the program?
- Was the lesson implemented as planned?
- Were facilitators satisfied with the facilitator training?
- Were facilitators confident in their ability to implement the program as designed (i.e., with fidelity)?
- Were facilitators confident in their ability to implement the program with trauma informed approaches?
- Were facilitators satisfied with the curriculum?
- Would facilitators recommend any changes to the curriculum?
- What insights/feedback do facilitators have regarding the curriculum and implementation?

Key outcomes questions include:

- Did program participants increase their knowledge of the emotional, social, legal, and financial realities and responsibilities of parenting?
- Did program participants increase their ability to identify child support services?
- Did program participants increase their knowledge of child support concepts such as establishing parentage and modification of orders?
- Did program participants report more favorable attitudes about sequencing parenting to align with other life goals?
- Did program participants report changes to their intentions about sequencing parenting to align with other life goals?
- Did program participants report increased self-efficacy about sequencing parenting to align with other life goals?
- Do participants articulate how their current or past situations (e.g., trauma, criminal justice involvement) may influence their approach to parenthood?
- Did program participants increase their motivation to sequence parenting with their education, career, and relationship goals?
- Did program participants increase their self-efficacy to sequence parenting with their education, career, and relationship goals?

### **Timeline / Next Steps**

A Training of Facilitators took place in March 2024 involving community partners, evaluation partners, and curriculum developers. Representatives from three organizations funded to implement the curriculum received training on the curriculum and on the evaluation tools and data collection plan. At the time of this report, CSD staff are identifying new community partners to expand implementation.