

GW

Stay at home moms

## What Can Be Done

### Supporters of Choice One generally favor the following measures:

- If people have children, they must be prepared to sacrifice self-satisfaction and personal ambitions for their children's sake. One parent should stay home with infants and toddlers, and both parents should spend more time supervising older children.
- Encourage parental childcare by eliminating tax benefits for daycare programs and by providing tax credits to stay-at-home parents.
- To help parents spend more time with their children, government should:
  - Develop a national insurance program, similar to European models, to help replace income lost while a parent stays home with small children.
  - Restore tax benefits for families with children to their 1940s level.
  - Encourage marriage by reducing family tax payments by one percent for each year parents stay together while raising children.
  - Raise the federal minimum wage to a livable family wage of about \$7.50 an hour.
- Repeal the 1996 welfare law provision that requires new mothers to find work – and put newborns in daycare – soon after giving birth.
- Extend tax credits to companies that offer work-at-home schedules and other programs that help parents spend more time with their children.
- Help noncustodial fathers reconnect with their children by expanding programs like one in Missouri, which helps fathers find jobs, pay child support, and re-enter their children's lives.
- Sharply increase enforcement of civil and criminal penalties for parents who refuse to pay child support.
- Expand family planning programs to reduce the number of people who have children before they are ready and expand educational programs that teach teenagers about parental responsibilities. Make parenting courses a prerequisite for obtaining marriage licenses.

the home, most fathers are busy, and most noncustodial parents ignore their family responsibilities entirely. And now, after more than 20 years of families trying to get by on daycare and "quality time," the evidence is becoming clear: kids don't do well with parent substitutes. The implications for parents, especially women, are enormous, but they can't be dodged, in this view.

If we want to raise healthy kids, Choice One supporters say, one parent should stay home with children under the age of 2 or 3. Traditionally, women have stayed home with small children, but Choice One says men should share this responsibility. And, in this view, because it takes two involved parents to raise children, couples should stay together, if at all possible, long enough to accomplish the important work of raising their children. A divorce that ends a bad marriage may well be in the best interests of the children, but Choice One supporters say that far too many marriages fall apart because parents put their interests ahead of their children's.

Having a child involves an 18-year commitment from both parents. Ideally, one parent should stay home or work part-time through all the child-rearing years; but, at a minimum, parents should spend hours, not minutes, each day with their children and ensure that they have adult supervision in the parents' absence. Noncustodial parents, nearly all fathers, cannot be allowed to ignore their family responsibilities, in this view.

### Wanted: Self-Sacrificing Parents

Today's parents spend an estimated 40 percent less time with their children than their own parents spent with them. Choice One sees this time gap, sometimes called the "parent deficit," as parental neglect, and cautions that it's becoming the social norm. Powerful economic and social forces, ranging from the global economy to the women's movement, have put enormous pressure on parents to put career and lifestyle ahead of child rearing, in this view. Well-intentioned parents try to do the impossible: raise families with hardly a pause in their dual-income pursuit of the American Dream of better jobs, bigger houses, and fancier cars. Many Americans, in this view, could step off this treadmill of consumption, scale back their lifestyles and work schedules, and give children what they need most – parental time.

*Infants and toddlers need a parent at home.* Someone other than a parent provides daycare for nearly half of America's infants and toddlers, and that, in this view, is a major problem for children and society. Studies repeatedly warn that most daycare arrangements, even when care is given by relatives or in family settings, fail to meet the developmental needs of most children. For example, researchers at Yale and three other universities surveyed 400 daycare centers in four states and reported in 1995 that only 1 in 7 centers offered the kind of warm relationships that teach children to trust adults and the intellectual stimulation that helps prepare children for school.

Researchers have long observed that infants and toddlers need to form secure, stable attachments with a nurturing caregiver. When small children don't spend much time with a parent, or spend time with a multitude of caregivers, the



Teens teach younger kids about the responsibilities of parenthood, as part of an innovative program called Dads Make a Difference.