

Office of Child Support Enforcement Offers New Resources for Custodial and Noncustodial Parents

HRA's Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) ensures that millions of dollars in child support payments reach the hundreds of thousands of New York City children who depend on them – but this is not all they do. HRA believes that every child deserves the love and support of both parents. With this in mind, OCSE has pioneered a number of new resources for both custodial and noncustodial parents to make caring for children and meeting child support obligations easier.

Paying child support is a vital part of responsible parenting, not a punishment. In some cases, though, a child support order may be more than some low-income noncustodial parents (NCPs) (the parent without custody of the child) can pay. If you are a noncustodial parent who makes less than the self-support reserve (which in New York is \$14,620 in 2009), and your children receive cash assistance from the City, you may be eligible for a Modified DSS Order (MDO). An MDO changes your child support payment to something compatible with your real income. Also, if you owe money to the government for child support arrears, this program may help you reduce those debts if they built up while you were earning below the federal poverty level.

“It's very difficult for a poor single parent to raise a child on one income, and chances are high that children in a single parent household will grow up in poverty,” said Frances Pardus-Abbadessa, Deputy Commissioner of OCSE. “Figuring out how to ensure children receive support from both parents is critical to helping reduce child poverty. There are a number of complex reasons why NCPs may have orders that are more than they can afford to pay or have accumulated large debts. By helping NCPs reduce their debts and aligning what they must pay to their actual income, we believe more NCPs will pay their child support and more children will receive the support they deserve and need.”

If you are not eligible for the MDO program and have fallen behind on payments (or never paid them), and have large child support arrears owed to the government, you can also apply to have these debts reduced after finding work and making current child support payments for at least three years through the Arrears Credit Program. And because you need income to pay child support, OCSE works with HRA's Family Independence Administration and their vendors to connect unemployed NCPs with work and training.

Child support payments are vital to the well being and self-sufficiency of hundreds of thousands of families throughout the city, but they are not the whole picture. Studies have shown that children benefit immensely from child support payments, but the emotional support of both parents is also vitally important. Because of this, OCSE has outreach programs to help parents understand the child support process, and to encourage noncustodial fathers to participate more in their children's lives. With these initiatives and outreach programs, as well as regular child support payments, OCSE is doing its part to ensure that those children have the best lives possible.