



New Parent Support Programs in the Military Services

For military families, new parenthood poses unique challenges. Military families are frequently geographically separated from their families of origin and civilian peers, and often lack physical access to their hometown social supports and parental models. To address these challenges, the four Military Services have developed programs to support new parents, starting from the prenatal period through the first year of life.

The New Parent Support Programs offered by the Military Services contribute to mission readiness, and support family adaptation to military life. They are designed to enhance the knowledge and skills that new parents need to form healthy relationships and to provide safe, nurturing environments for children.

Key Features of New Parent Support Programs (NPSPs)

- NPSPs are available at military installations worldwide
- Programs emphasize outreach to junior enlisted personnel who are parents
- Participation in NPSPs is voluntary
- The intensity of services and range of activities offered by NPSPs is matched to the level of family needs
- Programs include home visitations, education, counseling, and referrals to other resources to participating families

A range of support services for new parents is provided at every installation where families are sponsored by the command. Using the criteria of at least 300 births per year, New Parent Support Programs have been established at 260 military installations worldwide. Those installations that do not meet the criteria for a separate program are supported through services from an established program, agreements with civilian programs, and through installation Family Center and Family Advocacy Program staff. Because almost one-half of the military force is age 25 or younger and most families have their first child before this age, the majority of New Parent Support services are provided to families of active duty members between the ranks of E1 and E6. The program is available, however, to families of active duty service members of any rank or age who need support services.

Parents enroll in New Parent Support Programs via a variety of mechanisms, including self-referral, or referral from a health care professional or command. New Parent Support Programs, primarily staffed by nurses or social workers, provide services to assess new parents during prenatal care, or shortly after birth, to identify if and when additional support is needed.

To better target services based on assessed level of need, the Department of Defense developed a New Parent Support Program model that distinguishes two distinct levels of service. New Parent Support-Standard, offers prevention services such as educational programs, short-term home and hospital visits, information and referrals to other programs. New Parent Support-Plus offers a more intensive and comprehensive array of services, such as scheduled periodic assessments, long-term home visitation, health and child development services, and intensive parent monitoring. Home visitation is used extensively in all the Services' programs because there is general consensus that this is the most effective strategy for educating and supporting parents around the time of a new baby's birth.

The full range and scope of new parent support services and activities provided for participating families is impressive. Moreover, the Services currently have active or proposed program evaluations that provide important information on the effectiveness and impact of the various New Parent Support Programs in reducing or preventing child abuse.



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The U.S. Air Force New Parent Support Program

The U.S. Air Force's First Time Parents program is a maternal/child home-based program that targets families expecting their first child, and services address the needs of the newborn and its parents. Currently, the Air Force offers New Parent Support-Standard programs at 84 installations; New Parent Support-Plus programs are offered at 77 Air Force installations around the world.

Families in the Air Force's First Time Parents program are administered the Child Abuse Potential Inventory and the clinical nursing assessment protocol. Evaluation of the program indicated that participants experienced a significant decrease in child abuse potential, as well as increased confidence in caring for their newborns.



The U.S. Marine Corps New Parent Support Program

The U.S. Marine Corps' New Parent Support program is a proactive home visitation program geared toward the prevention of family violence. Prevention services, as well as home visitations, are provided to expectant Marine families, or those who have young children. The Marine Corps offers both New Parent Support-Standard, as well as New Parent Support-Plus programs at all of its 18 installations.

The Marine Corps' program is evaluated using a multi-site prospective design with repeated follow-up. Standardized measures are used to assess depression, child abuse potential, marriage satisfaction, and social support. Program participants evidence improved scores on these measures, and few participating families have been involved in incidents of family violence subsequent to program participation.



The U.S. Navy New Parent Support Program

The U.S. Navy New Parent Support Team is a voluntary early intervention program targeting Navy expectant and new parents with home visitation, as well as other prevention services. At the present time, the Navy has New Parent Support-Standard programs at 65 installations, 34 of which also have New Parent Support-Plus.

The Navy has implemented a Program Monitoring System for its New Parent Support Programs. Using this system, collected information and assessments are standardized across sites. Specific assessments administered include a family stress checklist, as well as measures of social support, family functioning, and parenting knowledge. This system will be instrumental in future evaluation efforts designed to track the effectiveness of the Navy's New Parent Support Program in preventing or reducing incidents of child abuse.



The U.S. Army New Parent Support Program

The U.S. Army's New Parent Support program is a community-based prevention program. The Army currently has New Parent Support-Standard Programs at 102 installations worldwide, with 27 of these programs also offering New Parent Support-Plus.

The Army's New Parent Support Program has an established research component that provides both process evaluation of the program and effectiveness of client interventions. A standardized assessment packet, consisting of the Child Abuse Potential Inventory, a depression scale, a Family Environment scale, and measures of marital satisfaction and maternal social support, is used to track programmatic outcomes.

References

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Department of Defense, Office of Family Policy. (1999). *New Parent Support*. Arlington, VA: Military Family Resource Center.

Resources

For more information on the Military's New Parent Support Programs, contact the Military Family Resource Center (MFRC) at <http://mfrc.calib.com> or at:

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