



Dads on Duty Program Overview

DADS ON DUTY:

Through funding from the federal National Fatherhood Initiative, the Parents As Teachers (PAT) National Center (St. Louis, MO) selected 8 agencies across the U.S. to fund. In 2008 PAT National Center chose the Healthy Start Military Family Cluster for its innovation in collaborating with the military and the surrounding community. Thus, in February 2008 Dads On Duty (DOD), a program uniquely tailored to young military dads with kids age birth - 5, was born.

Dads On Duty focuses on prevention and early intervention by giving fathers the opportunity to learn not only why it is important to interact with their young children, but also how to interact with them. This project specifically provides education, support and in-home services for young military dads, so that they can be the best parent they can be.

The program incorporates best practice interventions and creative strategies that promote positive parenting practices and parent-child interactions to help military families cope and display resiliency against child abuse/neglect. Many factors affect the level of engagement and interaction between a father and his child. Naturally, all fathers, like mothers, have their own way of interacting with and nurturing their child. While other programming works with mothers, DOD targets young military fathers by providing a range of opportunities for them to learn how to be a strong, loving fathers in an environment that is safe and free of the stigma that so often comes in the military with seeking "help". Since HSMFC operates outside the military system and command structure there is reduced stigma and freedom for military families to seek help without fear of repercussions on their military status/rank.

Services are available free of charge to all military fathers in San Diego County with children ages 0-5 years. The military is a very specific culture unto its own, so providing services that are specifically targeted to this population is crucial. HSMFC and its collaborative partners have the experience to provide these innovative services and DOD provides the right conduit for getting the information across.

Recruitment efforts have been successful due to the strong word of mouth referrals from past participants and relationships to military communication lines. For example, Navy Fleet and Family personnel post Dads on Duty announcements in the "Plan of the Day" announced to all servicemen at the start of their day. These strategies are used in addition to flyers posted locally, targeted email blasts, social media, -and interagency referrals from our numerous collaborative partners.

The Dads On Duty program consists of two mutually complementary components:

1. Group Sessions
2. Personalized In-Home Visitation

Group Sessions:

Trained facilitators use the international best-practice curriculum "24/7 Dad" (published by the Responsible Fatherhood Initiative). Meeting twice a week for 6 weeks, Dads On Duty group sessions give fathers the tools they need to be responsible fathers, covering topics that will make them stronger in their role, such as: self-worth, handling stress and anger, expressing feelings and emotions, and parental roles; to practical knowledge including baby's cues, discipline, crying, shaken baby syndrome, and potty training; as well as more in-depth topics such as child development, attachment, gross/fine motor skills, and language development. In

addition, 1-2 sessions include parent-child interaction activities (where dads bring their children) to practice what has been learned while the program facilitator/parent educator is present.

The strength of keeping the program limited to dads creates a sense of support and respite where these fathers can talk amongst themselves with others just like them, learn from each other and have an opportunity to implement what they have learned. This is a central component to helping dads support their young children. This process creates a bond between the fathers and that bond is an important support for them as they become better dads. All of this demonstrates that this project supports the value for the role of parents as the child's first and best teachers.

For outreach and engagement and to remove as many barriers as possible, the groups are held after work hours from 5:30-7:00 pm. Free childcare and dinner is provided for the family. In addition, for every 3rd session attended, gas card and movie ticket incentives are also provided.

These group sessions are the entry point into the Dads On Duty program. A very important and integral part of the program is to then connect these families to the free developmental screenings (credentialed Parent Educators use the Ages and Stages Questionnaire) and in home personal visits (using the evidence based PAT model).

Personalized In-Home Visitation:

The PAT Parent Educator, through personalized in-home support with the whole family, provides ongoing follow up, education, information and referral with families to help reinforce strategies learned during the group sessions and to promote their children's early learning and early literacy skills.

The Parents As Teachers (PAT) model uses interactive parent-child and parent education and support activities that share the same philosophy as the group sessions: that parents are their child's first and most influential teacher. As with the group sessions, this in-home visitation is strengths-based, provides parent education, parent and family support, and emphasizes parent-child interaction and the importance of play as learning. Parents As Teachers' "Born to Learn" curriculum, originally piloted at four sites in Missouri in 1981, is now used in over 3,000 sites in all 50 states, and many other countries. Thirteen outcome studies conducted since 1984 have proven PAT's ability to achieve its four goals: 1) Increase parent knowledge of early childhood development and improve parenting practices; 2) provide early detection of developmental delays and health issues; 3) prevent child abuse and neglect; and 4) increase children's school readiness and school success. The home-based component also provides an opportunity to identify children who may need developmental and behavioral services through screening, treatment and parent education, who can then be referred to our partners in the First 5 Commission's Healthy Development program, to the County Public Health Nurses, Balboa Naval Medical Hospital, or other appropriate resources.

PAT National Center sets high standards under this program model. Based on need, families are able to be visited as often as bi-monthly with available curriculum from birth to five years of age. Due to the intensity of this model PAT National Center's best practice recommendation is for a full time Parent Educator to maintain an active caseload of about 20 children at a time. Due to the transient nature of military families, historically HSMFC Parent Educators usually work with a family for about two years.

Past Military fathers have said:

- "I can't believe how awesome this group is, and it's free!"
- "Thanks to Dads On Duty, I now understand that when my 2 year old says "No!" it's not because she's trying to irritate me."
- "I'm mandated to go to certain groups, but this is the only voluntary one I attend, and it happens to be my favorite!"
- "I am more attentive to the needs of my family and have been able to recognize more cues that my child gives me when he needs/wants something or when something is the matter."
- "I am starting to calm down some and think about my actions prior to carrying them out when experiencing difficulties with my wife and children."
- "I listen to my son and don't yell so much. I learned how to be a better father."