

Learn to conquer
fatherhood with our
basic training manual



DADDY BOOTCAMP

Basic training for first-time dads

Written by Tanya Erickson

Welcoming a new addition to your family can stir up many emotions. We have designed a boot camp for soon-to-be dads so they don't get "blown up" when the baby arrives. Be prepared for many Groundhog Days that include sleeping, distributing rations, and lots of sanitary disposals.

Welcome Soldier

Your wife or partner is going to be so excited about decorating the nursery, and you should be too, even if this means giving up your superbase. Be prepared to spend hours upon hours putting together all the contraptions that your new baby will need. Also, your significant other may want to change the paint color of the room numerous times (yes, there are multiple shades of robin's egg blue) so just smile and go with it.

Be prepared for many prenatal visits. Although you do not need to be at every single one, you will want to be there for the first visit and the prenatal ultrasound. This is when you will see the tiny bean you helped create and listen to his or her strong heartbeat. You made that! Another important appointment you may not want to miss is the ultrasound at 20 weeks when you and your partner can find out the baby's sex. As the pregnancy progresses, your partner will put on a significant amount of weight so be prepared to wipe away tears after each doctor visit. Remember, no soldier gets left behind.

Your Mission

When your significant other tells you it's time to call the doctor and head to the hospital, do it! Don't panic though because that will make her panic and cause all sorts of issues you don't want to deal with, and then you will be stuck with a soup sandwich. Remember your training and make sure you both have your hospital bags packed and by the door months in advance because you really never know when baby is going to decide to come.

You and your partner should have discussed the birthing plan beforehand. Your wife may have told you that she doesn't want drugs during labor, she wants soft music playing in the back ground, and she absolutely does not want a C-section. You may have to throw all that out the window. You never know what is going to happen in that hospital room, but you need to trust in the nurses and doctors who are there. Stay out of their way until you are asked to step in and help; you have dropped in rank at this point. If your wife is yelling at you like a drill sergeant and wants to change everything she told you before, don't try to abort your mission! Smile and say, "Roger that."

If this is your wife's first baby, expect the labor to last anywhere between 12 and 24 hours (sometimes longer) beginning with the first contractions. If you go to the hospital when these start, the nurse may send you back home and tell you to wait. If this happens, it is your job to keep your wife as comfortable as possible. Rub her back and feet, walk the halls or the block with her, or run her a

nice bath. You should continue to do this even when you are in the hospital. Remember, you are the Boot.

Bravo Zulu

Whew, the hard part is over. Yeah right.

The early days are vital for new parents to bond with their child so don't allow many visitors. Set up a game plan beforehand on what will happen in the case of friendly fire - when friends and family bombard you. Be careful when they say they just want to come by and bring food; it's a trap and they will end up staying for hours - or days. One very important thing to keep in mind is that babies are not as fragile as you think. Yes, there are certain ways that you need to hold your baby, the football hold being the most favored by men, but don't be so stiff and still because your baby can pick up your emotions by your body movements.

What happens when you are "outside the wire?" How are you going to bond with your child? The best way to do this is as soon as you get home, take the baby from your wife so that she can rest, eat, and take a shower. Learn how to feed, diaper, and swaddle your baby because this is part of the bonding process. Set up a nightly routine with the baby that includes bathing, feeding, and rocking. Just keep in mind that you are not the first POG (Person Other Than Grunt) and it's okay to make mistakes. Tango Mike. CFM

TANYA ERICKSON is the mother of a son who keeps her on her toes.

HELPFUL BOOKS

- **Be Prepared: A Practical Handbook for New Dads** by Gary Greenberg and Jeannie Hayden
- **The New Dad's Survival Guide: Man-to-Man Advice for First-Time Fathers** by Scott Mactavish
- **The New Father: A Dad's Guide to the First Year** by Armin A. Brott
- **What to Expect When You're Expecting** by Heidi Murkoff and Sharon Mazel

For more hands-on practice, Memorial Hermann Hospital offers a "Dad to Dads" class and Houston Methodist offers a variety of birthing classes.