

Episode 1: Exceptional Family Member Program Overview, Enrollment and Disenrollment

EFMP & Me podcast transcript

Karen Terry:

You are a service member spouse and you've just received a recent diagnosis and you might need to enroll in EFMP. What do you do next? We're going to talk about that and more in this podcast for you, the EFMP family. Hi, I'm Karen Terry and we're going to be talking today about EFMP and enrollment.

Welcome to the EFMP & Me podcast brought to you by the Office of Special Needs and Military OneSource. My name is Karen and I'm a program analyst with the Office of Special Needs. I am also a retired military member and a mother of a special needs child. So, I'm very happy to share EFMP & Me with you because I really believe it can make a difference for you in whatever your role as you navigate through EFMP. For those of you not yet familiar, EFMP & Me is an online tool designed for the families in the program, to help them find information and resources whenever and wherever they need it. It can be accessed via your mobile device on Apple or Android, or on a regular computer. So, basically, as long as you have a phone or Wi-Fi connection, you can use this tool. So, it's easy to make it your first stop when you have questions.

There are 10 large topic categories to choose from. Topics are like education or PCS or medical. And each of those topics has multiple checklists within them that break down specific events or processes that correspond to that topic. So, it is a great place to start to get an idea of what needs to be done and who you need to talk to, to make things happen. Also, there are four profiles in EFMP & Me, and each has content customized to that user. So, you might be a family member, or a service member, or a service provider, or even a military leader. There's content just for you.

So, without further ado, let's get started on today's topic, and fittingly, we will start our first podcast with the first topic category in EFMP & Me, which is about EFMP and enrollment. Military families who have a military family member with special needs may have concerns about enrolling in the Exceptional Family Member Program. In this episode, we're talking to Rebecca Lombardi. Rebecca is the associate director of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Office of Special Needs, which we commonly call OSN. Welcome to our first episode, Rebecca.

Rebecca Lombardi:

Hi, Karen. Thanks for having me. This is, I think going to be a really good beginning to our podcast series.

Karen Terry:



Yeah, I think so, too. So let's get started with some of the basics. I'm sure that not all of our listeners know what OSN is exactly and how it's related to the Exceptional Family Member Program. Can you tell us a little bit more about your team and what OSN does?

Rebecca Lombardi:

Sure. The Office of Special Needs, as some of you know, was established by Congress in 2010 essentially to improve the Department of Defense's support to our military families with special needs and/or educational needs. The Exceptional Family Member program, or the EFMP is part of the OSN, but we also have oversight for IDEA services that are provided to families OCONUS, as well as to families CONUS who are living on an installation where there's a DODEA school. And as I recall, Karen, I think you're going to be talking about this in a future episode?

Karen Terry:

Yeah, we sure will, a couple episodes from now. It's going to be about education and we'll be going over more of those IDEA services then. Yes.

Rebecca Lombardi:

OK, great. We'll save that for the next episode.

Karen Terry:

OK. (laughs).

Rebecca Lombardi:

Moving on with OSN, we are charged with developing policy that guides the implementation of standardized support services at the installation level. So, essentially we're a policy office. But as part of this policy, our staff is also working in collaboration with the services, not only to develop that policy, but also to actually standardize the various services in order to improve support for our families that are enrolled in the EFMP.

Karen Terry:

OK. So, then EFMP is just one part of OSN, it's not all of OSN?

Rebecca Lombardi:

Right.

Karen Terry:

OK.

Rebecca Lombardi:

Exactly.

Karen Terry:



So, all right. OK. So, if I'm brand new to the Exceptional Family Member Program, what do I need to know? What is it? What's it for? How does it work? What are the things I need to know to make this happen for me?

Rebecca Lombardi:

EFMP is a mandatory enrollment program for all active-duty personnel who have a family member or family members with special needs. EFMP enrollment is not just for children-

Karen Terry:

Hmm.

Rebecca Lombardi:

... a spouse or other adult family member like a parent, could certainly be enrolled as long as the individual is an established dependent of the service member. EFMP helps improve readiness by ensuring their needs are considered during the assignment process. In other words, a family's medical and educational needs are assessed or looked at during the assignment coordination process to help ensure that the gaining location, the place that they're supposed to be moving to-

Karen Terry:

Uh-huh.

Rebecca Lombardi:

... has services that they need, which I think helps the service member complete their mission, because then they don't have to worry about what's happening with their family.

Karen Terry:

Right.

Rebecca Lombardi:

They know that the family can get the services that they need, which is very important.

Karen Terry:

So, does OSN do all of that? How do- how does, I mean, that seems like a lot of moving parts and complicated things. How is it organized so all those things can happen?

Rebecca Lombardi:

Well, that's a good question because it does get rather complicated. No, OSN, because we are a policy office, we don't do all of those functions per se.

Karen Terry:

OK.



Rebecca Lombardi:

There are three components that have very specific roles that contribute to the overall EFMP.

Karen Terry:

OK.

Rebecca Lombardi:

The first one is the Identification and Enrollment. And once somebody is identified with a special medical or educational need, the MTF, the medical treatment facility, works with the family to enroll them in the program.

Karen Terry:

OK.

Rebecca Lombardi:

The process of identification can actually take place in a variety of ways. The school may have identified an educational issue, the individual may be seen for a random medical appointment and an issue or condition may be discovered-

Karen Terry:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rebecca Lombardi:

... a family may self-disclose an issue-

Karen Terry:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rebecca Lombardi:

... or what often happens is during the screening process for an overseas move, it's determined that there is a special need.

Karen Terry:

Oh. So, that's why it's so important to get that screening done.

Rebecca Lombardi:

Yes, absolutely. Yeah.

Karen Terry:

So, who does that part, is that medical, since they go to the medical treatment facility?



Rebecca Lombardi:

Yes, absolutely. And that brings us to the second component, which is-

Karen Terry:

OK.

Rebecca Lombardi:

... Assignment Coordination. And this process occurs when a service member is actually preparing for that permanent change of station or their PCs move. And this is coordinated not only between medical, but the personnel commands as well.

Karen Terry:

Hmm.

Rebecca Lombardi:

And again, it's to ensure that the special needs of a family member are considered during the assignment process. To check with the gaining location, to see if there are services available to meet that family member's need. So, this process can be especially important because needed services may be limited at some locations.

Karen Terry:

Right.

Rebecca Lombardi:

And you need to know so that you don't go there.

Karen Terry:

(laughs) Well, yes. And this is one of the things that we hear about a lot is this Assignment Coordination process.

Rebecca Lombardi :

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Karen Terry:

Um, and that's personnel who are doing that.

Rebecca Lombardi:

Personnel and medical.

Karen Terry:

Oh, OK. OK. That makes sense.



Rebecca Lombardi:

Yeah.

Karen Terry:

OK. And then what's the last component?

Rebecca Lombardi:

And the last component is the Family Support component. And this one plays a critical role in helping families navigate the two components, Identification and Enrollment and Assignment Coordination-

Karen Terry:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rebecca Lombardi:

... as well as connecting families to information and resources, both on and off the installation, and providing additional support through the program's non-clinical case management services, which are a more hands-on approach for some families that would like that.

Karen Terry:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rebecca Lombardi:

EFMP Family Support is available to anyone with a special needs family member, including Guard or reserve.

Karen Terry:

OK. So, that's interesting about the three components. I'm not sure people are really aware of those three components and how they work together and what they do individually. So, for enrollment a family will work mostly with the medical component?

Rebecca Lombardi:

Correct. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Karen Terry:

OK. And then what are some of the reasons I might need to enroll my family member? We've talked of medical and educational, but you'd also talked about criteria. So, what would be some of those reasons?

Rebecca Lombardi:

Well, there are a variety of conditions that meet criteria for enrollment, and your medical provider or school can refer you to your installation MTF to assist in enrollment-



Karen Terry:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rebecca Lombardi:

... with the paperwork as well as enrollment into the program.

Karen Terry:

Oh, OK.

Rebecca Lombardi:

Each service at this point has their own enrollment process. So, I would highly recommend that people check with your own service for specifics on how to enroll. And just as kind of a side note, our office as the policy office is currently working with the services to standardize the Identification and Enrollment process across the services, so that it's a standard process. So, that if you are being stationed at a sister service, that process would then be the same as it is in your own service.

Karen Terry:

Oh, OK. Well, that sounds like it will be very helpful.

Rebecca Lombardi :

Mm-hmm (affirmative). I think so.

Karen Terry:

So, to make it easy for people right now, we have the hyperlinks for each of the services' EFMP policies on EFMP & Me. You can go on About EFMP and Enrollment, one of the checklists, and it will hyperlink you to your specific policy if you want to review that, and until we have a joint policy or a DOD policy. So, if I think my family member might have a special need, what do you suggest I do first? We've talked about criteria, so now I think maybe my family member has something that should be enrolled or a reason to be enrolled, where should I go? What should I do?

Rebecca Lombardi:

I would recommend that you start by contacting the EFMP office at your installation medical treatment facility.

Karen Terry:

OK.

Rebecca Lombardi:

After discussing your concerns with them, they can let you know where you need to begin. It really depends on your particular situation, and they really have the knowledge and skill to kind of help start the process and then help you kind of walk through that process so you know where to go from there.



Karen Terry:

OK. So, enrollment in EFMP is mandatory, right? Why is it mandatory?

Rebecca Lombardi:

Yes, it is mandatory. EFMP serves families by ensuring that the family's needs are considered during the assignment process. This goes all back to the assignment process. We don't want you to move someplace where care is not available. If it's not available, the family doesn't thrive, the military member being part of that family, of course, can't focus on the mission. So it really makes sense that we ensure that services are available when they're getting ready to, to move.

Karen Terry:

Right. So, kind of along those lines, I've heard a lot of reasons why people don't want to enroll. They have concerns about enrolling or they are mentioning, I guess, myths that some people have about EFMP. Can you talk to some of those? What are some of the common myths that you've heard about enrolling in EFMP?

Rebecca Lombardi:

Well, one of the things that we hear is that some believe that EFMP has responsibility for the TRICARE ECHO benefit, medical treatment services, that sort of thing.

Karen Terry:

Oh. And so is true? How do you answer that?

Rebecca Lombardi:

I will say it's very complicated. (laughs) I think there's a lot of confusion over that. However, the EFMP does not provide medical care to families. It has no oversight responsibility for ECHO or medical benefits. Medical care is medical care.

Karen Terry:

OK.

Rebecca Lombardi:

It is true that proof of EFMP enrollment and an eligible condition are required in order to access ECHO benefits. But that's really a verification process as op-

Karen Terry:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rebecca Lombardi:

... as opposed to providing medical care.

Karen Terry:



Right.

Rebecca Lombardi:

The MTF has a very narrowly defined piece of the EFMP, which is the Identification and Enrollment and Assignment Coordination, which are processes, not medical care.

Karen Terry:

So, OSN has no oversight over ECHO or TRICARE?

Rebecca Lombardi:

Correct.

Karen Terry:

OK. So, along the same lines of reasons people hesitate to enroll, I've also heard that EFMP will hurt a service member's career. Can you speak to that myth just a little bit?

Rebecca Lombardi:

Sure. EFMP is a confidential program. Information is only shared with individuals with a need to know. EFMP information is not made available to selection boards, and EFMP can enhance a service member's career actually, by ensuring that family members' needs are taken care of, even when the service member is away.

Karen Terry:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rebecca Lombardi:

It provides services that help improve the quality of life for family members through EFMP Family Support, enabling the service member to concentrate on their mission. But just as a point of interest, the Marine Corps conducted a study in 2016, and the results were really quite interesting. They indicated that there were no negative impacts associated with enrollment in the EFMP. And in fact, the study showed that Marines in the EFMP remained on active duty a slightly longer time than their non-EFMP peers, and achieved slightly higher ranks.

Karen Terry:

Hmm.

Rebecca Lombardi:

And I've heard anecdotally, which is not part of this study – the study has not been replicated across the services, I just want to be clear – but just anecdotally that in other services, there are service members that do achieve a higher rank.

Karen Terry:



Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rebecca Lombardi:

So, they move up the ranks and others do stay in longer.

Karen Terry:

Wow. So, that's kind of good news then (laughs).

Rebecca Lombardi:

But it's an interesting study.

Karen Terry:

Yeah, it sounds like it. And we're going to go ahead and put a link to that study in the episode description, so people can find it very easily, but it's also of course, available on EFMP & Me. OK. So, we've talked about enrollment and I'm just curious if there's any reasons a family can disenroll. Does that ever happen where they want out or once they're in, are they always in?

Rebecca Lombardi:

No, they're not always in.

Karen Terry:

(laughs).

Rebecca Lombardi:

Clearly, family needs change.

Karen Terry:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rebecca Lombardi:

There are circumstances under which a family may disenroll. As with enrollment, disenrollment must be assessed by a physician at the MTF. So, both the enrollment and disenrollment processes take place at the MTF.

Karen Terry:

OK.

Rebecca Lombardi:

Some of the reasons for disenrollment may be a change in medical or educational needs. If there's a change in medical or educational conditions and the family no longer meets criteria for enrollment into the EFMP, they very well may disenroll.



Karen Terry:

So, does that happen automatically or does the family member need to go and say, 'Hey, my child graduated from high school and is no longer in need of educational services. I shouldn't be in EFMP anymore.'

Rebecca Lombardi:

I think there are a couple of ways this happens. A family may go in on their own and make a request at the MTF. The other thing is that every one to three years, and that one to three depends on the service-

Karen Terry:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rebecca Lombardi:

... there is a review of each individual's enrollment in the EFMP, which means that their enrollment is looked at, it's updated, any new conditions may be added, conditions that no longer exists may be deleted and that sort of thing. So, they're reviewing it for the appropriateness of the enrollment.

Karen Terry:

Oh, OK. So, change in medical or educational needs. Are there more reasons or is that the only one?

Rebecca Lombardi:

Yeah, divorce may be another one.

Karen Terry:

OK.

Rebecca Lombardi:

And again, depending on the status of the situation, for example, if say the service member no longer has physical custody of the child and it's, I'm sure it's more complicated than that, but-

Karen Terry:

(laughs) It always is.

Rebecca Lombardi:

... if the enrolled individual is an ex-spouse, this would be something that you'd actually really have to look into, but divorce is definitely another issue.

Karen Terry:

OK.

Rebecca Lombardi:



Another reason for disenrollment could be that a family member no longer is eligible for care. Say the enrolled child reaches the age of 21, no longer meets the college or incapacity guidelines, that kind of thing.

Karen Terry:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rebecca Lombardi:

And death of a family member who is enrolled in the program. So, there are several ways that you would, again, really need to check with your MTF-

Karen Terry:

OK.

Rebecca Lombardi:

... and they could guide you where you need to go to start with this process.

Karen Terry:

OK. And of course you could find a checklist in EFMP & Me for disenrollment. We've talked about EFMP and enrollment, and now I'd like to talk just a little bit more about EFMP & Me, to give everyone a better idea of how it can help service and family members. It's new, it's less than a year old and I just want people to understand what it's all about and how it can help them. So, if you want to say something.

Rebecca Lombardi:

Sure. If you haven't had a chance yet, I really encourage you to visit EFMP & Me and, and look for whatever information that you are wanting, particularly in terms of this podcast, the enrollment information is under about EFMP and Enrollment. So, if you're looking for more information on that, please go and take a look.

Karen Terry:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rebecca Lombardi:

And this topic is, is just one of 10 major categories within EFMP & Me, correct?

Karen Terry:

Correct. 10. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rebecca Lombardi:

Yes. And there are a number of checklists located within each of those categories. I tend to look at this sort of like online shopping. And I know you hate it when I say that, but-



Karen Terry:

(laughs).

Rebecca Lombardi:

... you can pick and choose what you want, you can narrow down your categories and you can hone in on what it is that you want, as opposed to reading through a whole bunch of stuff that you really don't have any interest in. And I think that this is what this particular website, the EFMP & Me does for you. I think it's a great tool. So, I would really encourage you to try it out. The other thing is, if you're logged in to EFMP & Me with your Military OneSource login information-

Karen Terry:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rebecca Lombardi:

... you can save your work and come back to it.

Karen Terry:

Oh, nice.

Rebecca Lombardi:

So, if you don't have time right now, you can always come back and revisit it. You can also print the checklist out when you're done, whether or not you've logged in. So, you really don't need to log in in order to see this information. It's just kind of nice that when you do log in, you can save your work and come back to it and you don't have to print it all.

Karen Terry:

OK. And then you don't have to start over either because you saved it where you left off. Oh, that's good because-

Rebecca Lombardi:

Right, exactly.

Karen Terry:

So, who can use the EFMP & Me? Is it just for these service members and family members, or can anybody in the military or outside of the military use EFMP & Me?

Rebecca Lombardi:

Anybody really. We have designed it, of course, for service members and family members enrolled in the EFMP and the service providers and leaders who support them.

Karen Terry:



OK.

Rebecca Lombardi:

I think it's particularly helpful for families who may be geographically separated from a service installation, particularly Guard and reserve service members.

Karen Terry:

Or recruiters.

Rebecca Lombardi:

Yes, that's true. Good point. And I think that it's come out at a particularly good time, unfortunately, during this COVID pandemic. However, I think that fewer people are probably going out, it may be more difficult sometimes to get information. And this just gives people an additional way that they can get information 24/7 on issues and concerns that they may have about EFMP or special needs.

Karen Terry:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's a good point about the geographically separated or the Guard and reserve service members. As a former reservist, I know that duty status can change pretty quickly and one day you're not eligible for EFMP and the next day you're going on orders for 30 days or more, and you are eligible to join, and maybe even it's mandatory for you to join (laughs) at that point. So I think it's really great that there is a tool available right on their phone that they can use to kind of orient themselves to EFMP & Me, or EFMP in general and get started so that they know what to expect when they get to their installation and they're on their active-duty orders, and they can just kind of hit the ground running, I guess. So, that's a good point.

Rebecca Lombardi:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Oh, and having it on your phone, I think makes it even more accessible.

Karen Terry:

Yeah.

Rebecca Lombardi:

You can be out and maybe you have a couple of minutes of downtime, but there was something that you wanted to look up-

Karen Terry:

Right.

Rebecca Lombardi:

... and you can just pull your phone out instead of having to go to your computer and, you know, power it up.



Karen Terry:

Even the waiting room of one of those MTFs. Now you can look up stuff (laughs)-

Rebecca Lombardi:

Exactly

Karen Terry:

... now you have something productive to do. Great. Is there anything else about EFMP & Me you would like the families to know because we're getting close to the end here?

Rebecca Lombardi:

OK. Well, first of all, just thank you so much for having me on. I've really appreciated talking to you.

Karen Terry:

Oh, of course.

Rebecca Lombardi:

For me it was a great opportunity to be able to share with our audience some information that they may not already know.

Karen Terry:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rebecca Lombardi:

But there is one more thing that I would like to mention about the EFMP & Me tool.

Karen Terry:

OK.

Rebecca Lombardi:

It's that we would like to hear back from you. We put a lot of time and effort into this. We reached out to the services and to family members before we completed this task and asked what people felt was important to-

Karen Terry:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rebecca Lombardi:

... them and try to develop this in a way that would be helpful.

Karen Terry:



Right.

Rebecca Lombardi:

And we really would like additional feedback from you all. So, the next time that you're on EFMP & Me, go ahead and look in the upper right-hand corner of the screen and you'll see a contact button. You can click that and then click on Feedback, and you can then provide us feedback on what you feel works, how we could refine this, because we really do want to make this a tool that doesn't become old-school. We want to keep it up, fresh, we want to have information that is going to continue to be helpful to you. So, I'll stop with my pitch, but-

Karen Terry:

(laughs).

Rebecca Lombardi:

... we really do encourage you to write us some feedback (laughs).

Karen Terry:

Well, I'm just going to continue on with that pitch and just piggyback on it and say that yes, feedback is very important. EFMP & Me, the 'me' part is everyone out there who's (laughs) listening to this. And so we want it to be appropriate and meaningful to them. We want them to be able to have an experience with it that enhances their overall experience with the EFMP. So, in order to find EFMP & Me, there's a couple ways you can do that. The first thing is you could go onto Military OneSource and you will see a link for EFMP & Me. Click on it and it will take you right there. But it is efmpanme, all one word, E-F-M-P-A-N-D-M-E.militaryonesource.mil. Also, you can go onto the brand new app that Military OneSource has just introduced maybe a couple months ago, I think already. But you can get it at the App Store for your iPhone or for your Android. And it is My Military OneSource.

And if you download that and you go into it, you will see EFMP & Me, the little logo. You can click on that and will take you straight there, so you have a really quick and easy way to get there from your phone as well. Good news for service providers and leaders. We have just introduced the content for you on EFMP & Me. So, if you go onto EFMP & Me and you click on either Service Provider or Leader you will be going into a password-protected area. This is content just for you to give you more context to EFMP, to give you, as leaders, maybe you need a better understanding of what EFMP does and how you as a leader can better support your unit members. We've tried to really be intuitive in how we present the information, so it makes sense to you. It's easy for you to find.

You don't have to dig through a bunch of stuff to get to the information you need and make the most of the time you spend with your troops and your unit members, more productive, giving them direct information that would be appropriate to their situation. So, thank you all for joining us. I hope you found the information we shared today valuable and helpful. Please don't forget about the resources we mentioned. They will all be linked on the description page for today's episode. So, you can get to them very easily.



If you have feedback or questions, you can reach out to us at public that's P-U-B-L-I-C.militaryonesource.mil\feedback. Or you can use that handy little button that Rebecca just described at the top upper right-hand corner on EFMP & Me. We have more podcasts like this coming to you. The next one is going to cover the medical component of EFMP in much more detail. We have a subject matter expert from that medical component coming to talk, as well as a subject matter expert from TRICARE. So there will be some great information and can't wait to see you then. So, until then, have a great day.

You've been listening to a podcast for EFMP families brought to you by the Office of Special Needs and Military OneSource. Come back to catch our episode on education. I'm Karen Terry. Thanks for listening.

