

Office of Special Needs EFMP Podcast: Season 3, Episode 2 —Exceptional Family Member Program Standardization — Identification and Enrollment

Episode transcript

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the Office of Special Needs EFMP podcast, brought to you by the Defense Department. I'm Bruce Moody.

The Defense Department recently published a policy for the Exceptional Family Member Program. This new policy ensures consistency across the services for families with special needs. So we have a couple of episodes in this series where we're going to be working through the specifics of this new policy. Joining me to get into this is the director of the Office of Special Needs, and that's Tomeshia Barnes. Tomeshia, welcome to the podcast.

Tomeshia Barnes:

Thank you for having me, Bruce.

Bruce Moody

Excellent. So in our last episode, we had an overview of recent enhancements to EFMP due to the standardization that we're talking about. In this episode, what we're going to look at is what has changed in the area called identification and enrollment. So it's always great to have these things defined. So tell us what is identification and enrollment in the context of the Exceptional Family Member Program.

Tomeshia Barnes:

Thank you, Bruce. Identification and enrollment is the point of entry into the Exceptional Family Member Program. That's really that first step for us. And when a family member is identified with having a medical or educational need, those needs are documented through the enrollment process.

Bruce Moody:

OK. So explain to us the process of identification and enrollment.

Tomeshia Barnes:

So the process of identification and enrollment begins with the recognition that a family member presents with a medical or educational need that may constitute enrollment in the program. And within that process, there's two ways that it can be initiated. A service member and/or family member may reach out to the Exceptional Family Member Program office located at the military medical treatment facility to initiate enrollment. It's important to note that the service member or adult dependent will complete the demographic portion of the form.

The remainder of the form and the content that really talks about the medical needs of the family member or the educational needs of the family member is completed by the medical provider or the education provider. Once the forms are completed, the sponsor or the adult dependent goes back and signs the packet to signify they agree and are submitting accurate information.

After the forms are complete, the service member, could be the family member as well, will provide the completed forms to the EFMP coordinator located at the MTF. Now, if there is an educational need in addition to the forms, we do require that the individualized education program or the individualized family services plan is provided as well. The service member will provide the completed form to the EFMP coordinator located at the MTF.

Now, if there is an educational need in addition to the forms, we do require that the individualized education program or the individualized family services plan is provided as well. The EFMP coordinator will review the documents, and if there's a need for additional information or if the documents aren't complete, the EFMP coordinator will contact the service member for additional information. But from that step and from that process step, the EFMP coordinator will manage the documents with the appropriate staff to complete the enrollment process.

Bruce Moody:

Appreciate you going through that. Now, with the new EFMP standardization policy in place, what sort of enhancements will we see to identification and enrollment, and how are these going to benefit families?

Tomeshia Barnes:

So the two biggest enhancements that I consider benefits for families is one that, upon enrollment for families, the EFMP Family Support Office must contact the service member and family to provide information on support services available to that family. We're really pushing mechanisms to ensure that families not only are enrolled in the program, but we want families to know what services are available to them.

In addition to that, there is a requirement within the process to ensure that the enrollment decision is communicated to the service member and the family. And we're not saying that the military services did not perform those actions, but we really wanted to make it clear and transparent that the expectation is clear communication within this process on the decision that was made, as well as how do we support families. We want families to know from day one what's available to them, so they can take advantage of all available resources that can better support their family and their needs as well.

Bruce Moody:

Great. So the next question falls into the FAQ, the frequently asked question. Is enrollment in EFMP optional for family members who have a member with special needs?

Tomeshia Barnes:

Now that's a very good question, Bruce. And so, to answer that, enrollment is mandatory. It is not optional. Enrollment is mandatory for active and reserve component service members serving on active duty whose families include a member with special needs.

Bruce Moody:

So with that, how does being enrolled in the EFMP benefit service members and their families?

Tomeshia Barnes:

So when we look at the benefits, each installation has an EFMP Family Support Office staffed with providers who can help service members and their family in the following ways. So one of the major ways is helping families tap into their community resources, services and programs that will meet their needs, providing information and referrals to help the service members' families develop a family services plan.

EFMP Family Support Office provides training and other support to help the service member and family be their own best advocate. And we also provide a warm handoff to EFMP Family Support at the next installation when the service member PCSes. And that really helps with that continuity of services and accessing services upon relocation to a new installation, but also helps that proactive conversation so that there is that seamless transition of care and support.

Bruce Moody:

Great. So we have two tools on Military OneSource that I want you to talk about, and these are tools where listeners can get more information or support. The first one is MilitaryINSTALLATIONS, and the other one is Military OneSource.

Tomeshia Barnes:

So in the previous question we really talked about how does EFMP benefit and support families, and we talked about the EFMP Family Support Office. We know that as families relocate, they may be new to EFMP and/or relocating to a new installation, and they may not be sure who to contact as far as that EFMP Family Support Office. And so there is a link available in the program notes that provides the URL to look up your EFMP Family Support Office. You'll find information that'll connect you to that office, and it provides you the contact information you need to make necessary contact. Also, lets you know that you can also go to your current EFMP Family Support Office, and they'll also help to connect you to your gaining EFMP Family Support Office when you're relocating to a new installation.

The other resource that you mentioned was Military OneSource, and Military OneSource is that one-stop shop with a wealth of information. It has information about the Exceptional Family Member Program. It could be your educational needs, the school liaison program. There's just so much there on Military OneSource.

An additional resource on Military OneSource is access to special need consultants. Again, that link is available in the program notes, and you can contact Military OneSource directly by phone or set up a live chat. I encourage families as well as service providers and external providers to access Military OneSource for a variety of resources and tools that can help meet the needs of your family and help providers assist families in meeting their needs as well.

Bruce Moody:

Tomeshia Barnes, thank you so much for joining us today and helping us as we go episode by episode, as we go piece by piece through this new policy that supports families with special needs.

I think maybe I have one last question, or if you could perhaps explain to us when people think, Oh, they've just published a policy, that we've basically written what we're going to do in stone,

but it's not really like that. And I'd like perhaps for you to explain that this is an ongoing process of evolving support.

Tomeshia Barnes:

As we talked about EFMP standardization, the goal in all of our efforts is to improve and enhance the EFMP. And with doing that, there is continuous efforts that are in the works right now to further enhance the program. We also are going to connect with our families to learn of additional areas that we need to focus on for future enhancements.

Improving the EFMP is not a one and done. It is a continual effort that we are committed to, and we look forward to coming back on this podcast and sharing with you all of the additional things that will be in the works to improve the EFMP. And so my favorite saying is this is not a one and done. It's the beginning of a commitment and great efforts to come to continuously enhance the program for families.

Bruce Moody:

And excellent. We'll leave it there. Tomeshia Barnes, thank you so much for joining, and we will have you back to continue talking about this very, very important topic.

Tomeshia Barnes:

Thank you, Bruce.

Bruce Moody:

And thanks for joining this episode of the Office of Special Needs EFMP podcast, brought to you by the Defense Department. Be sure to subscribe wherever you listen to your podcasts, because we are covering all the EFMP standardization enhancements you'll want to know about. And as always, thank you so much for listening to us. You can always contact militaryonesource.mil for more information. I'm Bruce Moody. Thanks so much for listening. Take care. Bye-Bye.