



Send Him to Boot Camp! Basic Training All New Dads Need

By [Lorne Marshall](#)

Is your husband lost when it comes to holding your new baby, changing diapers, or giving baths? Get some help from Boot Camp for New Dads—an innovative program designed to help guys prepare for first-time fatherhood.

For nearly all new fathers, the joy of that magical moment when they hold their tiny, crying, red-faced little miracle for the first time is tempered by an unsettling question: *Now what do I do?*

Boot Camp for New Dads (BCND), a California-based organization dedicated to creating a vibrant, new culture of fatherhood throughout America, offers an answer to that question. And new dads will be thrilled to hear that the answer won't come in the form of 200 pages of single-spaced scholarbabble—it comes in the form of straight talk from real fathers living in their area.

During the last 15 years, BCND programs have been held at hospitals, community centers, and US military bases in 39 states and overseas. Generally, programs include discussion between a coach, three or four veteran dads ("veteran dad," in this case, denotes a father with a child aged zero to a few months old), and a number of expectant fathers.

Roughly one-third to one-half of the rookies return to BCND to serve as veterans for the next class of rookies after their children are born.

"At its most basic level, BCND is just men talking to each other about fatherhood," explains BCND Head Coach Greg Bishop. "For the expectant dads, or 'rookies,' as we call them, it's about taking some of the uncertainty out of being a father. The rookies can see the veteran dads interacting with their babies, hold the babies if they've never held a baby before, and watch the vets care for their children. Since fathering issues are fairly universal, the information is usually very helpful and most rookies walk away thinking, 'I can do this,' by the end of the program."

Often, the curriculum of a BCND program is determined by the veteran dads and the questions asked of them. Boot Camp for New Dads doesn't take an official stance on any parenting issue—natural childbirth vs. epidural,

breast vs. bottle feeding, and so forth—instead, the veterans share their experiences and respect the rookies enough to trust them to decide what's best for their families.

Of course, just as there's more to being a father than feeding, changing, and burping, there's more to a BCND program than discussing the physical care of a newborn child. "Many people might be surprised to hear that our biggest issue isn't caring for a child," Bishop says. "We spend most of our time talking about the new moms in our lives. Since statistics show that two-thirds of marriages decline in quality after the first child is born, it's vitally important that we discuss the role of a father in building a family."

According to Bishop, one of the key goals of fatherhood is to add balance to the new mom's life. In many homes, a new baby suddenly takes top priority, demanding huge blocks of time and attention that used to be devoted to the parents' relationship. As a consequence, the relationship deteriorates. Part of the BCND program involves encouraging new dads to step up and share in childrearing duties to create more time and energy for family-building.

"As the veterans talk about the personal growth that came from becoming a father, many of the rookies are inspired to rise to challenge themselves. It's encouraging to see the vets effectively set a higher common denominator for the responsibilities of fatherhood among the new dads," Bishop says.

BCND isn't just about education and personal responsibility; Bishop adds that the program contains a generous amount of fun. Many men miss out on the joy of fathering, Bishop says, and exploring the lighter side of being a dad helps the rookies remember that fact. For example, some BCND boot camps include baby racing, with Nascar-style numbers marked on diapers, while others offer golf lessons for infants. The program also contributes to a highly entertaining and completely unscientific body of new dad research; thus far, BCND researchers have discovered that watching televised sports improves infant development, as the brightly-colored uniforms and on-screen motion appears to improve visual acuity. Owning a projection plasma television, preferably with surround sound, enhances this effect.

All joking aside, the success rate of Boot Camp for New Dads is evidenced by the National Center on Fathering and the National Fathering Initiative's recognition of BCND as best practice in new dad training. But an even better indicator of the program's effectiveness comes from enrollment—more than 100,000 new dads have gone through the boot camp, and the numbers are increasing each year.

Be sure to read BCND's *Hit the Ground Crawling: The Essential Guide for New Fathers*, a book that encapsulates the fatherly wisdom BCND has gained during its 15-year history, from thousands of new fathers who have participated in BCND training programs. *Hit the Ground Crawling*, available solely through the BCND website (www.newdads.com), covers topics ranging from the pregnancy to bringing the baby home, taking care of the new baby to taking care of mom, and from forming a new family to returning to romance. The text also includes a troubleshooting guide for crying babies.

Are you an expecting or brand-new dad? Think you could use some Boot Camp training? Get a jump start with these words of wisdom, taken from *Hit the Ground Crawling*:

- The basic challenge you face is not changing diapers or comforting a crying baby, but working with your wife to form a new family.
- The tremendous changes experienced by new moms can be very tough and confusing, and they in turn can be tough on new dads. If this is happening to you, keep in mind you have lots of company.
- Fatherhood is about growing up and accepting responsibility. For most men, this takes time, so cut yourself some slack, but keep moving forward.
- There is no one right way to be a dad.
- Men bring their own unique strengths to parenting, and you should be confident that you are fully capable of caring for your baby.
- We learn best from men who are doing the job. Talk to your brothers, friends, and other dads around

you. You can blow off steam, gain some perspective, and get some new ideas.

- If you don't take care of yourself, you won't be in a position to take care of your new family. Keep in mind that your good health and mental well being is essential to all of you.
- While fatherhood is forever, it occurs one day at a time, and some days will be better than others. You are going to make mistakes, and each new day presents an opportunity to take another shot.

"The book summarizes the message we've been sending through Boot Camp for New Dads: fatherhood will force a man to go through changes, but a man can prepare for and embrace those changes—and the process isn't nearly as intimidating as many expect it to be," Bishop concludes.

For more information or to locate a BCND program near you, log on to www.bcnd.org or call (714) 838-9392.

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