

DAD JAMAL

Little Maryn was 2 months old when her dad left for a 10-month deployment to Bahrain where being a father was reduced to often awkward conversations via video chat.

“I was really excited about having a child, but really nervous,” said Jamal. “I didn’t want to leave my wife alone in El Paso where we had no family and the only people we knew there were in the Army.”

Along with all the challenges of becoming parents and learning to care for a new baby, Jamal and his wife, Gayle, needed to navigate a long, lonely separation that would require them to develop strong communication skills, high levels of trust and patience – lots of patience.

Their Nurse-Family Partnership nurses, Valentina and Patti, from University Medical Center in El Paso, guided them through Gayle’s pregnancy and the next two years when Jamal had to tiptoe back into Maryn’s life, giving her the space she needed to get to know him as her dad.



Jamal and his wife, Gayle, are the proud parents of Maryn (age 6) and James (age 2).

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-NFP DAD JAMAL

“Valentina was our original NFP nurse,” Jamal explained. “She was pregnant when we first got into the program, so she had to step back when her baby was born. Nurse Patti stepped in then and they were both great. They were very informative and supportive and assured us we were doing the right things.”

Jamal and Gayle were “adamant about parenting consciously,” Jamal said, “but we didn’t have the tools to really do that.” Valentina and Patti gave them the support they needed to be the kind of confident parents they had envisioned.

But it wasn’t without a few hiccups.

When Maryn arrived, Jamal said, Gayle experienced a common problem with breastfeeding.

“She had trouble with Maryn latching and she would get discouraged,” he said.

The nurses gave Gayle the advice she needed to solve the problem and taught Jamal how to be supportive and how to participate in the process so he could develop a bond with the new baby before he left for Bahrain.

They also helped him understand how to be an active partner from a distance.

“I was pretty strong on how I thought things should go,” Jamal said, “and they had to sit me down and get me to understand that Gayle was going to be the present parent and I had to allow her to take the lead.”

“Even though we would have frequent video chats and I would still be very much involved, they had a conversation with me beforehand so that I would understand she was going to have to adjust things along the way and I would have to be OK with it.”

Jamal said it was hard and, though Gayle “put on a good front,” he now knows how difficult it was for her.

“She didn’t want me worrying,” he said, “but I got a lot of insight about her feelings on the backside after I got home.”

Sometimes when they were on video chats and Maryn would be crying, Jamal said he would overreact.

“I’d say, ‘What’s going on? Why is she crying? Do something.’ And me being all worked up was contributing to her stress. I had good intentions, but I wasn’t very helpful.”

Then, when he got home, Jamal said he felt like an outsider.

“I wanted to reassert myself into the family, but I didn’t know how to do it.

“Nurse Patti had to show me the things I needed to do to be supportive and it helped immensely,” he said. “I had been gone for 10 months, essentially Maryn’s first year. I hadn’t been part of any of it. She had a natural bond with Gayle; she wanted to go to her mom. I had to take a step back and slowly work my way into her life.

“It was definitely frustrating.”

And there were a lot of other stresses in Jamal’s life at that time. He was working to transition to civilian life, going to school and training for a new job, so he was not as relaxed and available as he would have liked.

“It probably took until about age 2 for Maryn to bond

with me,” he said. “That’s when she really started warming up to me.”

Now, Jamal and Gayle live in Nashville, Tenn., with 6-year-old Maryn and their son, James, who is 2. Jamal is a Porsche technician and Gayle is a former parent ambassador for Nurse-Family Partnership, where she engaged with policymakers to make them aware of the program and how it benefits families and communities across the country.

“Maryn is super sweet, a rule-follower, who’s always trying to keep her brother and her classmates in line,” Jamal said.

“James, well, James is a little on the rowdy side.”

Jamal said it has been great to go through “the whole parenting thing” with James without being separated.

“We have great teamwork. I’m really proud of that. And we’ve both been able to show the kids the love they deserve.

“We just bought a house and got a dog,” he said. “It’s about as close to perfect as you could imagine.”



Jamal and his family now live in Nashville, Tenn., where he works as a Porsche technician.