

# DAD DANIEL

**What surprised Daniel most about his first encounter with nurse Irene was the homework. He admits that he didn't know what to expect from a Nurse-Family Partnership home visit, but it never occurred to him that it would be like school.**

And Daniel had so much to learn.

When his girlfriend Jessica told him she was pregnant, he was excited and slightly freaked out.

"I had no idea how to be a parent," he said. "I felt very overwhelmed and at the same time in this great cloud of excitement."

He was 27 and Jessica was 29 when they found out they were going to be parents.

"We thought we had five years of trying ahead of us," said Daniel, who explained that they were eager to have a baby, but Jessica had been diagnosed with problems affecting her fertility. They were living with their families and planning to take their time getting married and finding an apartment.

"We were shocked when we realized we just had nine months to figure all this out," he said.

The first step was to get a job, which Daniel accomplished quickly. He started running pony rides for a pumpkin patch near his home in Jarupa Valley, California.

Then the couple went to the Women's, Infants and Children's office, which referred them to Nurse-Family Partnership ® at the Rubidoux office of the Riverside County Department of Public Health in the same building.

When their first home visit was scheduled, Daniel confessed that he wasn't so sure about all this. But nurse Irene quickly put the couple at ease.

"She explained that she had years of experience dealing with mothers and infants, and that she had children of her own," said Daniel. "I had no baby experience and she made me take a step back and realize that this child is coming and it's going to be

a good thing. Now it was time to figure out what I was going to do with this baby."

Nurse Irene said Daniel was eager to participate at nearly every visit and was a good student.

"Me not knowing how to be a parent was just fine with nurse Irene," Daniel said. "It was on-the-job training. She brought materials and gave us our homework every week. But the class never ended. There was always something else to think about, something else to do."

Amelia Jolie was born July 31, and the couple faced the first in what would become a lifetime of tests as they navigated the endless demands of a newborn.

Jessica chose to breastfeed Amelia, which was complicated by her treatments for depression and chronic health conditions.

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Daniel and Jessica were excited to share their story at the CA State Capitol to help Nurse-Family Partnership reach more parents and give them life-changing support.



"Nurse Irene (shown right) opened up learning for me," Daniel said. At their Nurse-Family Partnership graduation (shown here), Daniel and Jessica shared how Irene helped them grow as parents and human beings.

"The doctors wanted me to give up nursing and take pills," Jessica said, but nurse Irene encouraged her to advocate for herself and get the doctors to prescribe medications compatible with breastfeeding. She also increased her therapy appointments and attended a pain management class.

"Irene not only made me accountable to go to my doctor appointments, to take my medications, to advocate for myself, but she also made Daniel accountable to take me to my appointments and for him to go to dad support groups," she said. "She made him aware of what signs and symptoms to look for and when to ask for help if my depression seemed to be worsening."

With Jessica breastfeeding that meant that "99 percent of the time the baby didn't want to go to me," Daniel said. "But that was OK, because after Jessica was done breastfeeding, I would take her and burp her. And a lot of the time in the night when Amy would cry, she just needed attention, not nourishment."

Nurse Irene told him that was where being a dad came in.

Daniel continued to be the one to burp her and calm her in the middle of the night. Then, one day when she was about three months old, he said, "she kind of looked at me and something clicked. That whole time I thought I was just holding this little baby, but something else was happening. We had bonded."

Nurse Irene taught them about the milestones to expect in Amelia's development, how to encourage her growth and how to gently guide her behavior.

"I really saw how he was trying to understand each developmental phase and why she was behaving in certain ways," nurse Irene said. "He worked to respond to her in a calm and patient manner."

Daniel appreciated every lesson. "I wish I'd known all this long ago," he said.

Daniel works in construction and has discovered that his newfound skills work there, too. "I've learned how to get people on the job to do things without using anger or threatening. It works."

Daniel and Jessica have a son now, too. Demetrius Ace is five months old and Daniel describes himself as a "confident father."

Still, he realizes how much more there is to learn. "I didn't get a high school diploma and I didn't go to many vocational schools. But I figured out that I like to learn. Nurse Irene opened up learning for me."

Daniel realizes that caring for a family is complicated, "but we got a great head start. I could not imagine where we'd be with our kids without the Partnership."

Jessica and Daniel now volunteer helping other young parents, and they participated in California Education Day at the capitol in April to help Nurse-Family Partnership to reach more new parents.

"We saw the importance of sharing our story," Jessica said. "We weren't nervous because we got to share from the heart ... our story of how much NFP impacted us and helped us grow as parents and human beings. It was not hard to decide to do this so that others can take advantage of these life-changing services."

Nurse Irene said she's seen them grow as parents and as a couple.

"They're really supportive of each other and they want to give back," she said.

"I'm really proud of them."