

DAD JERMAINE

Jermaine returns home from the pediatrician's office. His 2-month-old son, Ja'Marr, was due for a round of his immunizations.

"He did great," Jermaine says with pride. "He's a tough kid."

Those are words that every son longs to hear from his father, but it will be years before Ja'Marr understands that. And probably years more before he fully appreciates everything his mom and dad have already done to set him up for success.

The happy, healthy infant is growing fast, benefitting from the knowledge his parents have gained through Nurse-Family Partnership®. Jermaine, 24, and his girlfriend Shanice, 21, enrolled in the program when they found out she was pregnant. Through the program, they receive regular home visits from a registered nurse that begin early in pregnancy and continue until the child turns two.

During the visits, which take place in the Asheville, North Carolina, apartment the couple shares, they talk to their nurse Connie about what it will take for them to achieve Nurse-Family Partnership's three main goals: improved pregnancy outcomes, healthy child development and increased economic self-sufficiency.

Jermaine works at the Colton Mattress Factory in Asheville and participates in as many home visits as he can. After more than a year in the program, he says their nurse Connie is a true mentor, but he admits he was unsure of what to expect when he and Shanice began in the program.

"When we first started, I didn't really know what was going on," he says. But a small gesture on that first visit put both Shanice and him at ease. "Connie gave us her number and told us to call her if we ever needed anything. And I knew that she meant it. She just seemed trustworthy."

In the beginning of the program, Jermaine says that Connie focused on things that Shanice should be doing to make sure she had a healthy pregnancy. Once Ja'Marr was born, though, visits completely changed.

"Lately we've talked a lot about reading to Ja'Marr," Jermaine

says. "He can't talk yet, and I'm not sure he understands what we're reading to him, but Connie told us that it will help his brain develop in a healthy way."

Jermaine listens closely during home visits, often running back through everything with Shanice after Connie leaves.

"We're trying to do our best for him, so

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when something comes up or he starts crying, we put our heads together to figure out what is going on.”

He says the program is invaluable.

“We’ve learned things I would have never even thought we needed to know,” he says. “Having someone there to talk to, to answer your questions and give you pointers is so important. It’s great to have someone like Connie on your side.”

Connie says that as the visits progress and Ja’Marr gets a little older, she plans to spend more time with Jermaine and let him know what a great role model he can be for Ja’Marr.

“Jermaine is so thoughtful, so polite and respectful,” she says. “If Ja’Marr just watches and learns from his dad, he’ll grow into a great kid and wonderful young man.”

Jermaine and Shanice are also planning for Ja’Marr’s future even though he’s only 2-months old. Jermaine is confident about the success that lays ahead for his son.

“Connie has been talking to us a lot about financial planning and we’re starting a savings account,” he says. “Ja’Marr’s going to college.”

The Nurse-Family Partnership program in Asheville, North Carolina, is implemented through the Buncombe County Health Department.