

**A Therapeutic Story Telling Intervention**  
**Program Specifically Designed for**  
**US Military Families**

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## **Goals**

To provide US military families an enrichment-oriented educational experience that enables children and adults of military family life and orientation to gain a sense of self-agency or empowerment by identifying with the portrayal of reciprocal helping behavior and attachment in a loving relationship between a dolphin and a human being.

To help children and adults of military families understand that injuries (physical, spiritual, and emotional) can heal with proper care, instilling a sense of hopefulness for the future.

To present children and adults of military families with 1) a basic outline of important environmental concepts such as the basic biology and physiology of dolphins and humans; 2) the idea of a “web” of life in which all animals and people are interdependent and connected; 3) the concepts of conservation and preservation while maintaining focus on humans and their culture; and 4) the notion of consciousness and emotion in animals and humans.

## **The Program Brief**

Facilitators, such as specialized military personnel and special program military needs and resource facilitators will use lecture and a therapeutic story telling intervention to accomplish these goals. Participants will be presented with an oral story depicting the relationship between Dean Bernal and his dolphin friend JoJo as well as view the story of Dean and JoJo’s relationship as portrayed in a DVD produced by The JoJo Dolphin Project.

## **The Story**

*THE DEAN AND JOJO STORY* chronicles a two-decade odyssey between a man and a wild dolphin, and the very special unique bond that forms. Together they experience adventure, fear, and humor, explore the coral reefs, and encounter sharks. JoJo teaches Dean about his world, its beauty and its dangers. Their years of devotion to each other is a larger than life story that has turned many heads towards our significant duty to cherish our planet and each other. Their true and complete story is told to many who still haven’t realized this duty and to those who need to hear an uplifting and beautiful adventure story that inspire them to make an active and conscious difference interpersonally and externally in their lives. This story exemplifies the importance of a film with positive messages and rich content that will benefit those involved in the therapeutic Dean and JoJo military intervention program. This truly authentic and personal Dean and JoJo story opens minds, educates, inspires, and causes change for the betterment of one’s life.

### **Background of the Problem for Children and Adults in Military Families**

Children and adults growing up in Military families in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century have been subjected to unprecedented levels of stress and insecurity due to the effects of war and post traumatic effects of war. Specific and continued events of 9/11/01, the subsequent focus on domestic terrorism, as well as the associated military actions seem to have increased their anxiety and insecurity. Military parents, teachers, and clinicians have observed that children report and show signs of increased anxiety and insecurity, feelings of dread, and feelings of hopelessness about their own ability to be safe in the world, or fear their own parents safety, or the fear of the non return of parents from active duty, or difficulty processing the physical and psychological effects of the non return of parents form duty. The children of military families seem to have questions about who can be helpful to them as they strive to grow and find security and safety in our increasingly chaotic world. Some children and adults even seem to express their own insecurity by making other children feel unsafe or insecure.

The children of military families have questions about their own resourcefulness in the face of continued threats via media produced or actual events which threaten their security and safety. Military parents, teachers, and clinicians have reported that an increasing number of military children report or seem to have concerns about self-confidence, self-esteem, and about their ability to create change and safety in their environment.

One way of intervening to help military children and military families negotiate these dilemmas involves therapeutic story telling. Story telling, as old as human culture itself, involves the transfer of information crucial for the adaptation of human beings in their complex social and natural environments. Therapeutic story telling involves a process of active learning in which children are drawn by facilitators to certain aspects of a narrative for a therapeutic purpose.

In this project, military children and military family members will be drawn to a number of important meanings in the JoJo and Dean narrative. Among the topics military children and military family members will be encouraged to consider:

- How Dean helped JoJo when he was a juvenile dolphin.
- JoJo's response to the loss of his family in a stranding as well as his last two remaining dolphin relatives to a boat strike and an accidental spearing.

- JoJo's ability to learn confidence and survival skills from Dean, a human.
- JoJo's ability to show Dean aspects of his underwater world through their experience together.
- Dean's ability to teach other humans about how to interact with JoJo without threatening him unintentionally.
- Dean's feelings about JoJo's injuries from boat strikes and shark attacks.
- JoJo's feelings about his own injuries.
- JoJo's trust in Dean in allowing him to administer antibiotics and medical treatment to him and his ability to heal from his wounds.
- Dean working to protect JoJo's habitat from unrestrained boat traffic in order to ensure the safety of JoJo and other ocean creatures.
- JoJo's protection of Dean from a dangerous shark attack.
- JoJo's sense of humor.
- The importance of having children help JoJo and the human population by protecting their environment through conservation.
- The reciprocal, trusting and loving relationship between Dean and JoJo, how they actively help each other with their problems, and what we can learn about all relationships from Dean and JoJo.

### **Background of the Problem for Adults in Military Families**

Many adults in military families also experience a disruption in the development of their sense of personal agency or empowerment. Many adults of military families feel powerless to affect their environment, other important people, themselves, or their health. Maladies caused by military activity and involvement such as depression, medical illness, domestic violence or emotional abuse, substance abuse, relationship conflict, and dissatisfaction with work often involve a disruption in a person's sense of agency. That is, military personnel with these difficulties often feel that they cannot change themselves or their situation.

The narrative of JoJo and Dean provides an illustration of the following themes that can be discussed and emphasized in a therapeutically oriented story telling presentation for adult military personnel:

- Dean was able to overcome a great deal of resistance from the human population in order to establish legal protection for JoJo.
- JoJo's ability to heal from his physical wounds and maintain a trusting and affectionate relationship with all humans despite being injured by humans.
- JoJo's ability to manipulate his world and his experience by establishing a trusting and loving relationship with Dean.
- JoJo's possible self-consciousness as evidenced by his sense of humor, self-recognition in the mirror, and the ability to play "hide and seek" with Dean.
- The reciprocal, trusting and loving relationship between Dean and JoJo, how they actively help each other with their problems, and what we can learn about all relationships from Dean and JoJo.

### **Target Population of Military Families**

This therapeutic story-telling intervention was designed to have a broad application but specifically directed to the needs of military family difficulties. Of course, all military individuals and civilians certainly benefit from a thoughtful intervention in which active helping behaviors, personal empowerment or agency, and humanitarian and conservation actions are considered. However, the Dean and JoJo story has many profound subtleties that increase the possibilities for therapeutic action.

Medical or emotional illness of any kind, whether chronic or acute, challenges our ability to feel hopeful about the healing process. Sometimes we have difficulty accepting our helpers and the healing they offer because we have doubts about our own power to heal.

JoJo and Dean illustrate that profound healing (physical and spiritual) can take place as long as a trusting and caring relationship is maintained between the helper and the individual receiving the help. The Dean and JoJo story also illustrates how JoJo accesses powerful capacities for healing in the context of a trusting, helping relationship with Dean.

Military family populations that may be particularly well-served by this story-telling intervention include military children suffering from the loss of a parent in the military, children who suffer from the changes in behavior in parents who have served in combat, military families who face medical illnesses acquired during time served in the military, such as traumatic stress, burns, loss of body parts, and physical wounds in which they must endure great pain and uncomfortable long-term treatment.

JoJo's many physical injuries, which are documented in the oral story as well as on the DVD, heal because of Dean's help and JoJo's will and ability to remain a wild, self-sufficient animal, despite his injuries. Chronically and acutely ill military children suffering from medical illness may well identify with JoJo's power to heal his own wounds and resume an active life. Identifying with JoJo, may provide military children with an internal image that will increase their own sense of power and self-determination in the face of potentially overwhelming illness or injury to them self or even a family member.

### **Therapeutic Military Intervention Procedure**

Military family participants will be provided with a 15-minute interactive lecture in which the following topics will be discussed. This introduction takes the focus away from a military focus and livelihood.

- I. Overview of the Dean and JoJo story and the Therapeutic Story Telling Intervention
- II. Basic Dolphin and Human Anatomy and Physiology
  - A. Shared dolphin and human mammalian characteristics
    1. Warm-blooded/homeothermic.
    2. Live- young are breast fed milk
    3. Large brain
    4. Social organization
    5. Communication
    6. Culture and learning
    7. Rearing young/children through cooperation of family group
    8. Emotions in humans and higher mammals and possibility of self-consciousness in dolphins
  - B. Dolphin Physiology / Human Physiology
    1. Dive reflex/apnea
    2. Sonar/echolocation
    3. Chirps, whistles, squeaks, signature whistles, and human speech.

- III. JoJo and Dean's story will be told orally, and important elements of the DVD narrative will be highlighted as noted above. (The story is told in about 7 minutes.)
- IV. Military family participants will then screen the DVD. (The DVD takes about 7 minutes.)
- V. Military family participants will then be led in a discussion by facilitators about their reactions to the DVD. Attention will be paid to helping participants note important aspects of the story as discussed above. (About 5-10 minutes.)
- VI. Military family participants will be given paper and colored pencils and crayons and will be asked to create a set of three drawings in which they depict either an actual or imaginary experience in which they help a human, animal, or the environment; or in which they were helped by another human, animal, or the environment or both. They will be asked to structure their drawings as follows:
  - A. The first picture should introduce and depict the characters in their story.
  - B. The second picture should depict the problem the characters face.
  - C. The third picture should depict how the problem was solved and how the help was given.
- VII. Military family participants will then be asked to voluntarily show their drawings and tell their stories to the group. Facilitators will help focus the discussion around concerns and questions such as how the characters depicted in the story felt before they faced the problem? Was help asked for directly or was help given intuitively? How did the characters feel when they faced the problem? How did they feel when they were helping and being helped? How did the characters feel when the problem was resolved? (This activity (drawing and story telling) takes about 30-25 minutes.)
- VII. The group will close with a discussion of their overall reactions to the therapeutic story telling intervention and ways to improve the presentation in the future. Military family participants will also be asked to come up with ways in which they might be able to help JoJo, other animals and humans, and/or the environment. (The program takes about one-hour and fifteen minutes from start to completion.)

## **FOLLOW UP FOR MILITARY FAMILY**

### **THERAPY INTERVENTION**

#### **Dean and JoJo – The Product**

The Dean and JoJo program will be available to children of military families and other military family members through a strategy of reminders in their healing processes. A therapeutic military family line of Dean and JoJo products will be available to them at PX USA bases and also military bases internationally. These products consist of stuffed Dean and JoJo toys, plush animals, and a book series for children, shirts, and DVDs etc.

The Dean and JoJo therapeutic products are also passed from military family house-hold healing environments and US military complexes and then gifted into countries where war victims also need therapy and care. Dean and JoJo gifts are like a mascot for the military families here in the USA, but also purposed for the sentiments of giving and sharing in order to promote the healing processes in the homes and in the lives of children and soldiers in war affected areas. The Dean and JoJo military family mascot is a symbol of the healing and change within ourselves despite the outer circumstances or war or external crisis.

The Product line will also be followed up with a complete feature film shown on military bases in order to encompass the story in military lives and amongst friends. Dean Bernal will also be available to visit military bases who pre arrange visits and show the film. He is a strong advocate to personally meeting military personnel and their children at family programs for entertainment and purposeful visits.

#### **About Dean Bernal**

Dean Bernal has been likened to “a cross between Dian Fossey, Jane Goodall, and Crocodile Dundee”. Excerpts from the story of Dean and JoJo have been featured in countless books, TV specials and movies including the Academy Award nominated IMAX film *Dolphins*, narrated by Pierce Brosnan, two PBS specials: *In the Wild: Dolphins* with Robin Williams, and *Dolphins: Close Encounters* with George Page, and they were featured on Peter Jennings’ *World News Tonight*. BBC, Cousteau and Nature specials have also feature excerpts of their story.

### **The Film**

Their story is an awe inspiring and suspenseful adventure film and a non-violent drama of survival and action which includes dolphins, whales and shark encounters seemingly beyond belief. The life of Dean and JoJo are revealed only through provoking the realities of a 20 year life that most documentaries are not capable, but their lives are revealed in this film. A cross between the captivating story line of the feature film *Finding Nemo* and the documentary novelties and sensitivity of *Penguins*, while sharing the innocents and humor of a relationship found with *Wallace and Gromit*, yet ranks with the research and seriousness carried out by Jane Goodall and Diane Fossey.

### **In Closing**

The Dean and JoJo therapy enrichment project and products characterize a human fulfillment specialty program and items specifically designed for the military family therapy programs. The Dean and JoJo therapy product line allows individuals to take home as a keepsake and a concrete reminder to their healing internally. The therapy program along with available products is purposed for healing present military difficulties within the family.