



# The Hafer Family



BRANCH: US Navy

DUTY STATION: *USS MITSCHER (DDG-57), homeported out of Naval Station Norfolk*

EFMP CATEGORY: 5

Four years ago, after failed attempts at fertility treatments, the Hafer family decided to adopt domestically through their local DCFS. This is their story:

We adopted Theodore and AJ from our local DCFS in California. We knew that their prenatal exposure to drugs and alcohol would present special challenges for our sons, and for life. What we didn't expect was their eventual diagnosis and placement on the autistic spectrum.

From the diagnosis process to obtaining ECHO coverage, we've had wonderful EFMP and ECHO liaisons. We will be forever grateful to TRICARE/ECHO for the amazing benefits our boys are entitled to – so long as my husband remains active duty. One area of grave concern is what happens to our services for our boys upon my husband's retirement from active duty. He has served our country admirably and continues to do so. However, there is soon to be a time when our desire to be together as a family will overrule his desire to serve. At that point in time, all ECHO services (read: ABA) effectively stop for our boys. We know without a shadow of doubt that their autism spectrum disorders, behavioral issues and learning disabilities will not end just because active duty service ends.

Having special needs children is, in all honesty, a huge stressor on a family – a family already dealing with lengthy deployments, cross country moves and everything else that comes with being a military family. Respite goes a long way to helping a family recoup their sanity! Unfortunately the current respite situation, as provided by ECHO and NACCRA is far from adequate. Families in Hampton Roads are placed on an "indefinite" wait – as in, no one can tell you how long it is going to be before your number comes up. The undue stress, worry and depression that this can cause families is unacceptable. With extended family being out of the area and few friends who understand special needs children, our family has had to forgo the opportunity to collect ourselves and re-center ourselves.

In short, TRICARE/ECHO has some wonderful options for our active duty military families, but I do believe that change and progress needs to happen. We know that our active duty military does an amazing job for our country, and their missions are ever-evolving. Don't they deserve a healthcare benefit that does the same?