

## VA helped this student Veteran learn to cope

**Justin:** My name is Justin. I was in the Army National Guard for seven years. Got out as an E-5 Sergeant and did two tours, one to Bosnia, one to Iraq.

We were patrolling one day, in our Bradleys and I was on the gun and our driver, we were going down a dirt road and we hit an IED and he ended up losing his foot because of that. So, that happened which was, kinda really shook you up a little bit. Next patrol I went out on, we hit another one, so that just kinda this, it all just kinda came in at one time.

But then after that had happened probably one of the most significant was one of my really good friends was, they were out patrolling and they hit a large IED and two of them were killed and they were both in the same Humvee and one of my friends lost his legs. I was on the base and they were probably, man maybe a mile or two off base. I listened to the whole thing unfolding on the radio. I actually ran over to my squad leader and just said, "Alright we got to go, stuff went down, like we got to get out there and help them out."

But then for, I think it was a couple of days, you don't really process it all. Like, it's just not...it's just like you're kind of...every waking moment's just like a reoccurring nightmare, or like you're just living it. It's bad enough losing a really good friend but knowing that the next day you got to go out to that same area, that same spot and just do your job.

Coming back was great just cause I was engaged at the time so all that. But I just know like there was a big difference in how like I just viewed people and I just didn't give people the time of day as much. I didn't tolerate a whole lot. I just had kind of a tainted view on life in general. I just was angry. There was an edge to me, I'll say that.

But, and then another huge adjustment was like when you go from being America's hero and like really doing something that you felt like really mattered to going to college classes and then getting a job it's like, that was a huge, huge adjustment.

I still had a lot of trouble sleeping and still do at times with just falling asleep. My mind constantly going, just kinda feeling that tense, on edge feeling. Like, loud doors being slammed shut, things falling, I mean just like very on edge, startled very easily. There were several discussions I'll call them, arguments with my wife that kinda led me think like yeah there's probably a little bit more than I'd like to admit here. So...

It was kind of a long process, a painful process of actually getting to that point where, okay, I gotta man up and own some of this stuff and realize that hey, there's something wrong here. So, what I ended up doing was I contacted my County Veteran Service Officer and just said, "Who do I need to see to get set up?" And he connected me with someone at the VA. It was really tough to admit that there was things wrong, but once I finally went in, it definitely started getting me down that road of just being able to cope with life better.

I did a lot of the mental health stuff that they had, and I did an occupational therapy type stuff. Because I'd had some just, whether it was related or not, but just like some



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memory loss. Just like I couldn't remember stupid things like my organizational skills. I was in school at the time and going into class and not being able to concentrate, focus, remember things and then it was just kinda of a nasty, vicious cycle because all that stuff would come up and then I'd just get more frustrated, more tense. They diagnosed with TBI, so I did a lot of just different mental exercises and they did a lot of assessments and stuff.

I talked to a Psychologist and the guy I was meeting with was like yeah, you know what, I mean you're not alone in all of this. There's a lot of guys coming back with like, almost like, rubber-stamp type issues. To be able to take that first step of just reaching out to someone at the VA, that was one of my biggest helps being back in transitioning and just being able to understand a lot of these things and understand that you're not alone in them is a huge help. And people they're there to help and they're willing to help you just gotta be willing to get that help.



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