

Aaron learned strategies to manage PTSD symptoms

Aaron: My name is Aaron, and I was a member of the first 119th field artillery. I was a member for eight years with one tour in Iraq in 2005 where I was stationed in Ford Operating Base Abu Graib in support of detainee operations. The biggest turning point was what's called the Battle of Abu Graib, which took place April 2nd, 2005. I was within 40 meters of a 120-millimeter mortar incoming explosion. I was unable to sleep for probably a week and a half at all, and when the time came for me to get back on duty, when I approached my previous compounds something inside of me just wasn't letting me make that next step, so I was never able to return to the scene of where the explosion took place. Consequently with that I also spent even more time in the emergency room seeing Iraqi and civilian casualties come in on a daily basis.

I had gotten some good advice from a Vietnam vet prior to deployment to, you know, actually sit down and talk about everything to people that I keep close by, and I was able to express a lot of my frustrations and things that had built up within over the course of a year, and I started working right away, went right back to work. Some people take a month or so but I was still in that go-go-go mentality, let's get the mission done. But then it wasn't until three or four months, maybe a year later, my wife really started to notice changes in how I behaved, how I slept, physically and emotionally. I had some anger issues, a lot of resentment. Some people call it survivor's guilt, you know, I know a few guys that never came home. Six or eight months after being home the nightmares really started to come in. You know, it's just middle of the night, all of a sudden I'm back in Iraq, full battle mentality, running, chasing people down, or it could be just something as simple as, you know, I'm constantly replaying an isolated incident that really doesn't mean anything.

My wife really urged me to check into the VA system and get a full rundown on everything that was going on, and once I kind of got my foot in the door there I started exploring to what else I was going with, what else was going on with me, and up until just recently when I moved to Minneapolis I started seeing the PTSD recovery team and went through a whole cognitive therapy program, physical therapy and all sorts of different programs that were available to me and I figured, you know, it'd just be a waste of resources if I didn't at least stop and check them out.

I really had to depend on my wife and others to kind of give me feedback as to how my behavior and attitudes are going, because you can easily slip into depression for two, three weeks and not even realize it. Throughout the therapy and things going on there I was able to recognize what was going on within myself and use the strategies and techniques that I've learned through the VA to overcome that to a certain point.

You know, there's really no sense of me sitting around blaming the military for whatever reason when, you know, there are resources and help out there, whether it's just something small as going out with the recreational therapy group and doing an outing with them or if it's a full-blown 12-week cognitive therapy program through the VA, by maintaining a good relationship with my network of people at the VA, they can always refer me to somebody else. As any soldier knows, you know, you can't really go into battle by yourself. You have to have your support staff and a support team and on the home side, having somebody reliable, dependable, understanding and that has compassion to what your needs are and what you're living through really helps the process along.



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