

Vulnerability is where healing happens

Jake: My name is Jake. I was in the Army from 2008 to 2012.

I loved being in the Army. I would never change it for anything, but there were a lot of challenges that came with it, too. I lost some friends when I was in, and even just in Basic, my father died when I was in Basic Training. So that was a bit tough.

I didn't deal with the emotions that much when I was in. I could see that I was having issues with it, but wasn't willing to talk about it at all. Like there was a point after Afghanistan where I was like crying myself to sleep a lot of nights. And then, like, I'd wake up the next day and almost forget that even happened.

So when I got out of the military, I was still drinking a lot, to like use that as like self-medication. And I just was, emotionally, just completely shut off. Like, my mom would always say that I was like kind of cold and different. She was really worried about me. And with friends, I didn't have a lot of friends.

For the most part, I just stayed at home. Like, didn't spend much time with anybody.

Having nightmares at times and just terrified. And I'd usually wake up shortly after that, just like breathing really heavy.

I still didn't want to seek help for quite a while. And it took having a friend that worked for the Indianapolis VA and like her knowing that I was depressed and just, she was a huge stand for me going and actually seeking help and getting help.

My first experience with the VA was the Indianapolis VA, which was amazing. I went in on Friday afternoon and they set me up with a meeting that following Monday with my entire team, like a case manager, social worker, like, my mental health doctor and a primary care, like I got to meet all of them the very next Monday, and got to actually sit down and like have appointments with them. So, that went really well.

Since I wasn't doing much of the therapies, and I would take these antidepressants and the SSRIs just for a few weeks until stuff just seemed to get worse, and I would stop, and just kept going through that cycle. And then, I just lost it a little bit, like had a complete breakdown, just actually pulled my gun out of my nightstand and I was considering suicide at this point. And then just, even that thought going through my head, I just bawled up on the, like, curled up on the floor and just bawled my eyes out.

I really think what saved me was just my dog, like, she pushed her way up to me, just laid her head on my chest and wouldn't leave me. Like, that all, that whole night, or like the next couple days, she was stuck to me.

That was when I realized I had to actually do something. Like, I couldn't just keep putting off and just acting like everything was okay, going to get better, because it doesn't get better unless you do something.

I was searching online for like holistic ways of dealing with PTSD and I did seek help with an online program. I found their website, found the application, and filled it out. It was like 2 or 3 in the morning.



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One of the questions on there just lets you unload. Like, it's just open-ended, let's you tell what's going on, and I just unloaded on this, like all the crap that's going on in my head, just how horrible everything felt, just how much pain I felt. And I got a call, like, 30 minutes after I hit submit from one of their staff members, just, "Hey, brother. You okay?"

They saw it come in and they called me. And then I went to the actual programs and they taught, like, a daily practice of meditation. They taught about PTSD and how it affects the brain, and just how meditation goes to change that. And then just a lot of team-building exercise in it all and showing that you can trust each other again and that you can, like, everybody going through it, they set you up so you can all lean on each other and reach out to each other.

It was all other people who'd been through the exact same stuff and people I could relate to. It was all Veterans and First Responders. So everybody there could, like, easily say, "Me, too. I've been there. Like, I know what the sleepless nights are like. I know what it's like to just, like, remember the anniversary of a friend and just cry."

It's okay to be vulnerable and vulnerability is where healing happens. When you can tell your story and let people know, like, what you've been through and just admit and accept that what happened happened, like, that's when you're going to heal.

There's tons of different organizations, there's tons of different programs that give you that space to do that in. So, find the one that fits for you.



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