

Exposure therapy can provide relief and recovery

Interviewee1: Coming back from Afghanistan was interesting. You get that “that honeymoon phase,” everything’s going to be great, but it quickly dies off. About two weeks later and all of a sudden, you haven’t dealt with some things and some of those monsters are starting to creep up around your shoulder.

Interviewee2: The words “Vietnam,” I would have this shooting hot pain in the back of my neck and so I began a life of avoidance and ducking and hiding and just keep your mind on the job and anything else.

Interviewee3: I just figured I was going to, suck it up and fake it til I make it and it would go away eventually, but it didn’t.

Interviewee4: It was mostly anxiety, being hyperalert. You don’t really get this sort of sense of calm or control over your life and your body can really only deal with that for so long.

Interviewee5: And then, finally my wife said, “You need to get,” pretty much told me I need to go see somebody; get with the VA; get signed up.

Interviewee2: I talked to a psychologist who said, “We have a therapy called Prolonged Exposure that we’ve had really good success with. It might take you from like 12 to 17 sessions, but it’ll help.” And I just thought, “12 to 17 sessions, wow that’s not forever.”

Interviewee4: What it involves is basically repeated exposure to the traumatic event and so the idea behind it is to lessen your reaction to it so that it just kind of becomes a more normal part of, instead of this whole separate anxiety-filled event, you become less stressed out with it and better able to function in society.

Interviewee6: Going back to that, those incidences and talking about them, let’s go back, let’s process through.

Interviewee7: It felt good talking about my experience in Iraq. It felt good talking about my fears and my concerns and my worries. It felt good having someone to listen to me and not judge me, but just to get all of that emotion and anger that I had built up out.

Interviewee3: Trying to create or produce or extract as many memories as granular detail as possible about, various episodes in combat which I couldn’t remember or which I had glossed over, which I had not processed.

Interviewee5: You just keep reciting it over and over again. They record it for you. You go back that night, listen to it a few times. The next time you go back, you do the same thing. You remember more and it’s kind of, it brings it back a little bit, but it also helps you deal with it.

Interviewee2: We made a list of all of the traumatic events that happened to me in Vietnam and we made a list of all the things in my life now that triggered memories of these.



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Interviewee1: Crowds of people, the market down here, that would scare me and going to a giant baseball stadium packed, that would probably scare me a little bit. But what they did is they started working it out, “Okay, hey I want you to go, into a small crowd basically like a little park. Okay, there’s not going to be that many people in the morning.” So, it was kind of a good way to just ease me back into it.

Interviewee4: Your experience becomes less traumatic, so you feel more comfortable in your environment. And so, I did notice like a difference. She had me do different exercises where I would go out and kind of work up to getting to the point where I could go into the parking garage and not be really apprehensive about it.

Interviewee7: Exposure therapy was awesome. It helped me to realize some of the things that I were doing I can think of different things to do and just make the situation for me more comfortable.

Interviewee5: You realize it’s not a threat. So that was one way they treated me for that and it’s to the point now where I don’t think about a lot of those things anymore.

Interviewee1: It’s just like watching that scary movie, playing it over and over and it’s not scary anymore.

Interviewee2: So that’s what this therapy can do for people. You can get your life back.

Interviewee3: I have a much better perspective and my head is much clearer.

Interviewee4: Instead of going through life and kind of questioning my environment or not dealing with that, I was able to use the services through the VA to just kind of change the path that I was headed on from being over alert and really stressed out and not able to focus very well to actually change my life so I’m much better now.



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