

## She sought help for herself and her family

**Jennifer:** My name is Jennifer, and I was in the Navy as a Seabee. I served from 2004 to 2015. As a Seabee, my job was to fly around the world and do construction. Whatever was needed and for whoever it was needed for. I came from a very poor family, and there was a lot that I dealt with there and I wanted to get away from. So, I joined the Navy but when I joined and I went to A-School I ended up getting raped, and I never dealt with it because I think anybody was going to want to hear my side of the story or they wouldn't believe me. So, I just kind of held it inside, and I didn't talk about it for like 10 years.

I was sad, miserable and angry, and I didn't even know it. I thought I was happy. I was drinking. I was partying on the weekends. I was out there pretending to be somebody that I wasn't, and so I snapped one day and I almost hit my daughter just because she was saying mom. She was just, "mom, mom, mom." Like kids do, and I snapped. It was nothing, what did I snap over? So, I called my husband crying like "hey, can you come home, I need to go to mental health."

I went in there and like I said I'd almost hit my daughter. So, I'm sobbing and I'm crying, and I'm trying to explain to the receptionist why I need to see somebody so bad right now, and I couldn't even get it out. And she was like, " You know what, it's okay, just come sit down. Here's some water and we'll get you somebody." And that's what she did. She set me down and they got me somebody to talk to, and it wasn't going to be my main counselor and I knew that but it was somebody, and I went in there and I just screamed and yelled and cried, and I didn't even know what half of what I said was or why I said it. I just got it out but this was a release and there was no judgement, and she wasn't trying to fix me she was just listening to me, and that was the first time it happened, the first time somebody just heard me, and that was so important. I didn't know how important it was to just be heard.

I went to quite a few therapists before I found the right one. The first one I ended up going to was a male therapist. I didn't feel that connection with him and maybe because he was a male and I wasn't ready. You just got to make sure you find the therapist you connect with, and it's okay to say no to a therapist you don't because you can't connect with everybody. So, I ended up getting another female doctor and it took a little while but I finally opened up to her and started talking to her and then she put me in group therapy, and that's when I was able to see that I wasn't alone, and that there were others that have been through it and we can overcome this together. I don't have to even go through the process by myself. I can go through the process in a group, and we can be strong for each other.

One of the reasons that I waited so long was because the military has a stigma with mental health, and I always heard that if you go to mental health you're weak. You must be crazy. I don't have too many regrets in my life but that was one of my regrets, not breaking the taboo because there's nothing wrong with getting mental health.

Now that I have help, I'm happy. I don't have to do it alone. I don't have to struggle alone. If I'm sad, I have tools to either help myself get happy or to allow myself to cry. I was stacking it all away and I wouldn't release it until it exploded and then I couldn't control it, and now I can control the release and I can control how I put it away. So, it's very empowering. So, it allowed me to be a better mom because now I have those tools



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that not only helped me, I have tools I can help my kid with which is really cool to. So, it's like my therapy actually helped everybody in the house because now I get to share my experiences and my tools. So, now we can open up and be a much happier and more honest family.

To be brave you have to find a reason to be brave. So, find your reason. Mine was my kid. I couldn't be brave enough by myself. I hadn't been. I mean I went 10 years, I still wasn't brave enough. It wasn't until my daughter that I became brave enough and it was for her. It doesn't matter what your reason is. You have to just find a reason to find joy, to find happiness, to live. Once you find that one reason you just hold on to it for dear life and you keep chasing it.



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