

Exposure therapy helped this Army Veteran

Steven: My name is Steven. I served in the United States Army and served in Kirkuk, Iraq in 2009. I was a 12 Bravo as a Combat Engineer. We provided route clearance in Iraq. I'm very honest. I deal with PTSD and the most, the significant trauma event was in July of 2009 and it was when we were scheduled to a mission. I was put in the front truck as a gunner and about 15 minutes prior to SP, maybe half an hour before start time for the mission, our LT had suggested that I be moved to the third truck and Morgan take my place in the front truck. The truck was hit with a claymore-like IED. It looked like a giant shotgun had hit the truck and it had taken Morgan. There were no coms. Nobody was signaling. Everything we thought the worst, but Morgan had received a spinal injury from it, TBIs and some other issues. But for me, knowing that could've been me was my surviving, survivors guilt knowing that he is still injured to this day because of that.

The whole issue of being highly aggressive or being hypervigilant and not really showing any sympathy, empathy this causes a lot of issues especially with my wife. And it was, it wasn't until we had a very serious argument. I grabbed her arm and I had never grabbed her ever before and by grabbing her arm, she's like, "Look what you're doing. This isn't you." And I was like, "Holy crap, this isn't me." And at that point, when you realize that's not you, you need to get help.

So, finally at the point I actually decided to approach the VA and see if I can get some help. I, in the end, was able to get in a prolonged exposure and the psychologist would sit there and go through very detailed questions to have you remember very detailed things about the past. After you would have these conversations, you're recording the whole thing. So, the next thing you did after you did a session. You would take the recording home and you would listen to it. By having you repeat the story and then you listening to it back, it would take the situation and create some sort of normalcy. It's a very intense therapy, but it is by far one of the most important because I probably wouldn't be here had I not done the therapies. I still have an issue with crowds. Having to deal with mass crowds and if anything, I would either try to find, like rush through to get where I needed to be or just not go at all or go wait somewhere. It'll probably never go away, but the fact of the matter is that I have the ability and the skills that have been taught. If I didn't have the tools given to me through my therapies, my therapist, my mental health provider, I don't think I would be here, number one. I don't think I would have a wife. I don't think I would have one son and one on the way. So, it's been extremely positive. Depend on other veterans, if somebody knows how to navigate the system to get you the help that you need, use it. Every person that's been a part of my care at the VA has actually been very helpful and once they help you, hang onto to them because they'll help you the rest of the way.



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