

## The secret to a strong marriage after service

**Dawn:** My name is Dawn. I serve in the Army Reserves. I joined in 2006. I went to MI and then reclass, and then went to Afghanistan in 2011. I actually did both my jobs over there which was kind of unique.

My husband, boyfriend at the time, had gotten into a very serious fight, so he had TBI, he was unconscious for like 18 days and then he came home after like seven months in the hospitals. So, he was home and then I was the only one there working with him. He didn't really have a lot of other people to support him. He was recovering and he obviously had a lot of things going through his mind. He has done three combat tours. The first one was pretty reasonable, but he lost his father just before the first one, lost a bunch of friends the second one, lost one friend the third one and the brain injury itself, all very traumatic.

So here I am, girlfriend of six months, and I love the guy to death, we knew we were going to be together so it wasn't like I was like, "oh my goodness, now I have to do this." It wasn't anything like that, but my dad was a Marine growing up so I was raised as a Marine daughter, raised to be a tough kid. So I generally was like, "oh I can do anything, I can deal with all of this," and then it just got to the point where we were having fights, we were getting situations were very intense and I was like, "well maybe I can't deal with this. Maybe I need some help." So that's when I went to start talking to someone.

We pretty much just talked for the most part. She didn't really give me any assignments or anything like that, but in the course of conversation, she'd say things like, "maybe he's just looking for your support" and then I'd be like, "oh, maybe he just needs my support." You know, just really kind of ring bells as to things you take for granted. Like, I need to support him, he's depressed obviously so it doesn't do my any good to beat up on him. It helped me take a step back. At times, I was like, "oh well, I need to push him. He's not getting out of the house, so I need to get him out of the house," and then she's like, "yeah, you're not going to do that, he has to do that for himself."

It changed the way that I looked at it, took some of the burden off me even sometimes I thought I had to do all this stuff. Well no, I don't. And then things got a lot better. You know, our very intense moments went from once every two days to once every two weeks and then even less.

It's not just the Veteran that suffers by any stretch of the imagination. I was pretty fortunate in that I understand where he's coming from with a lot of it because of my background. I can't imagine someone who has not been in the military. They probably have no idea. They see their husband who used to be so nice, and now he's angry and they're like, "what did I do? Why am I terrible?" It's not you. You never know what's out there unless you try it, and there's several different ways.

There's several different avenues. Maybe go to the VA, but first they have to want to get past it. I think some of these guys want to be angry. They feel like it's their punishment or whatever and it's just a matter of knowing you don't have to be angry. You don't have to be mad all the time and tired all the time. It never hurts to have help. Never hurts to talk to someone or have someone on your side. You're not alone. You're not the only one that's went through it.



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