

Joe sought support after an anxiety attack

Joe: My name is Joe. I enlisted in 2004 in the Army and I spent, of my six years, I spent a majority of it stationed at Fort Bragg in North Carolina as a Psychological Operations Specialist. And then in 2008, I was in Afghanistan. This was my first major combat deployment and I'd say probably like the second day we had several mortars come down and there was just that moment like it kind of clicked like, "Oh, geez, what have I gotten myself into."

I was fine when I got out of the Army. I moved back to my parents, was going to school, felt really fine at home, nice to see my family and friends. And then my wife was coming back from Afghanistan and we were staying at a hotel just right across the street from where I lived for four years, and I got down there and I just had bad anxiety like the whole weekend I was down there. And I said, "You know what, I'm gonna drive home, get back to my parents' house, I'll feel fine." But driving home, really uncomfortable the whole way home. My hands started going numb, my lips, my tongue, my whole body just went numb, and I pulled over and called 911 and they sent out an ambulance to come get me. I spent a couple hours in the hospital and then for like two weeks after that I just had not severe, but mild anxiety all day. I missed two weeks of school. I missed finals, but after that I said, "You know what, I really need to get help for this," because something that goes on in your head that can just cause your body to just shut down and go completely numb and you can't function was really scary. And I said, "I don't want to deal with that again."

I went to the VA Hospital. They assigned me to a clinic near my parents' house. I met with a counselor and they had prescribed me to take Valium and that worked out really well. I started out bi-weekly meeting with a counselor just, I mean, it almost felt like we just had a casual conversation and we'd talk about like my thought process during when I start to feel anxious and some kind of exercises I can do to calm myself down. But I felt really comfortable speaking to the counselor that I was with and it really helped out a lot. Things got better over the course of five or six months, and instead of bi-weekly, went to monthly, and then bi-monthly.

I'm doing mechanical engineering, which is well, it's a lot of work if you want to do well. So, having that housing allowance is just like the best thing in the world so I don't have to work a job and I can come, and I do, I study for six to eight hours a night and get straight As. I'm excited about finishing school and going out and getting a job.

For me, it was an easy decision. I had those anxiety attacks and it was terrifying and I did not want to deal with that the rest of my life. I can't imagine not getting help for that, but I had the support my wife. I talked to my family who I'm really close with about it. It's just, you have to find it in yourself to get help.



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