

## Getting through tough times with support

**Mike:** Hi, my name is Mike. I entered the Delayed Entry Program September of 1998. I had just started my senior year. I did not join the service until June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1999 in the Navy. I enlisted in as a cryptologic technician technical, CTT. I greatly enjoyed the Navy as an individual. I enjoyed my job on the sea, I loved the water, the blue, but it was lonely when I started having children. My first deployment I had been married maybe a year or so...the second deployment my daughter was a little girl. I cried like a baby and didn't mind anyone seeing it, I just hugged her because I knew six months is a long time, so it was mixed emotions, and when I got out of the Navy, came home, had a job with my Dad, it went under.

Now I've got a house, no car, no job. I made a promise to my wife I'd always provide for her and be there for her. Here she is, struggling, don't have money for groceries. The home was being foreclosed, the lights are out, we're, you know, no power, no water. I battled stomach problems, I battled headaches, I got to understanding why people did suicide. I never got where I said, "Okay, how am I going to do it?" I didn't want my kids to have a dad who committed suicide, so I never got that point, but I got to where I understood why people did it. That's when I started to get help. That's when I called the VA and said, "Here's my feelings, what can you do for me?" And eventually they got me to a one-on-one therapist.

The first couple psychs I saw, they were very conscious on why I was feeling this way. This guy had a different idea. He says, "I don't care why. You'll always have these thoughts in the back of your mind, but it'll be a different relationship, where you learn how to live with them, you ignore them, don't let them impact your life, but you can't get rid of them." He taught me that your thoughts are not you and try to see your thoughts as a separate object, and that helped me a lot for some reason. I would go through that practice every time I feel depression or the thought or frustration or guilt or shame, I would try to just wait, let the feeling be there, but just picture myself away from it, and that's what we spent about 18 weeks working on.

I'm not healed, per se, he's right, I probably will fight these my whole life, but I have a much better control. I may go a year, I may go two years, but I'll probably always find some way of keeping in touch, just because it does give me an outlet. When I can't burden my wife with it or when she doesn't have the answers for me, I'll go somewhere that can, and it's been a big blessing in my life, giving me an outlet.

Spirituality is a very delicate subject when depression and mental illness or whatever, mental health, because there's that stigma that, "Well, you have God, you shouldn't have depression," you know, "If you're depressed you're just not praying enough," but I was always talking to my pastor, I've always had a spiritual authority that I submitted to and he encouraged me, he says "No, that's not the case. You take medicine for cholesterol, you know, mental illness is a disease that you can help. Don't feel guilty, you don't feel guilty for diabetes, you don't feel guilty for getting the flu."

You're not weak. You're not at fault. You know, you would laugh, if a grown man drowned in two inches of water, you'd call him an idiot because all you had to do was stand up. It's the same thing not seeking help with the VA. All we've got to do is stand up and get help.



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