

Grounded in the Present

Joey: My name is Joey. I served in the Washington Army National Guard as a 13 Bravo Field artillery specialist from 2009 until 2015. I joined the National Guard in the large part due to their call to respond to natural disasters. I grew up on the Gulf Coast and experiencing hurricanes and the impacts of those was a huge part of my life and my childhood. I had seen the impacts of natural disasters on communities, and so there was a certain part of reliving that can be challenging, reckoning with all that kind of devastation, as it were.

I joined in the middle of both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. I think one of the big blessings I had when I served was that I didn't actually get deployed. All of the activations that I had were for state emergencies and things like that. When I completed my service with the Army National Guard, about six months later, I was actually diagnosed with a rare form of pancreatic cancer diagnosed stage four. In the midst of kind of closing off one chapter of my life, I was also immediately opening a new and somewhat more challenging one.

Coping was really challenging. I probably spent two to three years in a really reactionary state trying to figure out how to keep my head above water, socially, fiscally, and then with my physical and mental health as well. What led me to seek mental health treatment was my partner. Having someone who I trusted say, "Hey, you could really be helping yourself and doing yourself more favors by utilizing some of the resources that are available to you." Yeah, my partner was really huge in that transition.

My first experience with mental health treatment was through a program called Headstrong. They provide free mental health services to veterans and their families. Really quickly connected with a therapist. Almost immediately, I noticed marked improvements in my life and my outlook in my ability to work in my social life. Talk therapy has kind of been the underpinning of all of the mental health treatment I've received. It's super vital in helping me kind of actualize my day to day interactions and things that happen. Having a third party be able to help you relate things has been really vital to me in the last couple of years. I'm diagnosed with PTSD and then I also have ADHD, yeah.

Through my mental health treatment and focus, I've gained a lot of tools when it comes to responding to stress kind of in the moment. Mindfulness has been really huge for me. Realizing my heart is racing. Realizing I am in a stressed situation. Realizing that my temper might be rising. Having an awareness of those things has really grown through my mental health treatment and has been huge in the way that I respond to stress today.

Most of my hobbies are related to getting outside. I think being outdoors really helps with my mental health recovery because it pulls away a lot of the stressors of everyday life. Getting outside really, I think, lets me have space and time to myself and feel more



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grounded, and it's hard to argue with good weather when you can get it. I find ongoing therapy really helpful because life keeps happening. Some of the mental health tools and communication tools that I've learned in therapy really help me be more direct to both the people and the circumstances in my life.

If I had advice for other service members on and veterans on whether or not they should seek mental health treatment is, honestly, if you're asking yourself that question, give it a shot. I think if you do and if you seek it out, it'll probably become much more obvious whether or not you needed it, and I have a feeling it'll be really beneficial.



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