

## Recognizing signs of PTSD and TBI

**Schuyler:** My name is Schuyler. I was in the army, active duty, 6 years.

**Schuyler:** I think the overall experience of being in a combat zone stays with you forever.

**Schuyler:** I think my vehicle got blown up directly, maybe 4 times and then indirectly, a handful of times. So, I think there's like an anxiety that sticks with you about stuff like that.

**Schuyler:** Getting out of the military, it's scary, you know? Because you have this whole life that you learned. For me it was six years active duty in an infantry unit and now I have to all of sudden go be a civilian.

**Schuyler:** I didn't have any army buddies around, so I didn't have people that I could talk to and hang out with, and I kind of felt alienated from the civilian world because I didn't share anything in common.

**Schuyler:** When I got out, I didn't think that I had PTSD, I almost thought PTSD was something that people who couldn't handle the intensity of their job, had. And when I got out, I didn't think that I had any issues or mental health issues that would affect me in the civilian life.

**Schuyler:** I found that I was having trouble controlling my emotions sometimes. My anger, my frustrations, it was easier for me to get frustrated and when I did get frustrated, I took it more seriously, as if something serious was going on. If I was running late to a movie, I felt like I was running late to a mission and people's lives were at stake, but that wasn't the reality.

That personality characteristic, that intensity, that drive makes you succeed in the military, but it doesn't in the civilian world. It alienates you. And I had to back off and let that go, and that was hard. It took a lot of other people coming up to me and telling me "Hey, I think you have PTSD," or "Hey, I think that you have things going on that you need to talk about or you need help with." And I said "No, I don't think I have PTSD" "What could I have PTSD from?" and I was always thinking there has to be some specific event.

I don't have a constant nightmare where I wake up and I'm reliving a specific situation. I'm not constantly bunkered down in my house behind sandbags, waiting for the invading army to attack. I don't have any of those things going on. But there is something kind of wrong, you know. I do have this agitation, this anxiety, this hypervigilance from time to time. Maybe something's not right.

**Schuyler:** So, I went down to the VA and they asked me, they said "Have you ever been blown up before?" "Or have you ever been exposed to a blast?" And I said, "Yeah, quite a few times." And they were like "How many?" And I told them, and they were like, "Wow, well you probably have traumatic brain injury."

**Schuyler:** They helped with my memory and concentration issues and how to regulate my mood and stuff like that, and that was a really productive experience because at one



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point I felt hopeless. I felt like I'm on the road to not recovering. I'm on the road, I'm on a downward spiral into some abyss of like mental disability. But working with speech pathology and TBI clinic at the VA, I mean they had me turned around quick. And in a few months, I was in school.

**Schuyler:** I got to the Boulder Vet Center but there seems to be one located within proximity of every VA hospital. My therapist was an infantry soldier. He was deployed to Vietnam twice and speaking with him, working with him, it made me feel comfortable to talk about my stories because I knew they were familiar to him. He knew the same emotions that I knew. He had the same feelings that I had.

**Schuyler:** Vet Centers are great because they have this group dynamics aspect where you meet all these other combat Vets and I think that requirement alone creates a little brotherhood that makes me feel comfortable walking into a group. Because I say these guys know what I'm talking about. They know what I know, they've seen what I've seen. If I'm going to open up or feel uncomfortable or be in an awkward situation, it's not going to be awkward because they have those same feelings and any advice they have for me is going to be beneficial and I can take it to heart because it's coming from somebody with the same experiences.

**Schuyler:** You're a civilian now and the best way to come to peace with all of that stuff, the best way to come to terms with all your experiences, is to talk about it, is to find other Vets in the community, is to go to a local Vet Center down to the VA and talk about those experiences.

**Schuyler:** The first thing I would say to anybody is it's not abnormal, you know. All the issues you're dealing with, you're not alone. You are not the only one. You are not weak.

**Schuyler:** And the second thing I would say is go down to the VA. There is no better place to get help for a Veteran than a place that is employed by Veterans, run by Veterans and is designed to work around Veterans.

**Schuyler:** I want to be a behavioral and cognitive therapist that works with combat veterans. So, I'd go from Schuyler the high school dropout, to Staff Sergeant to Schuyler the Rugby player to doctor.

**Schuyler:** That's a path that I couldn't have even started without the VA. They set you up with the road to success there.



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