

Brian didn't let anxiety stop him

Brian: My name is Brian, I served in the Army National Guard, and from '04 to '05, served in Kirkuk, Iraq. I remember for the first few months going outside the wire or going on missions and feeling very tense. The feeling of never knowing when maybe an IED was going to go off, anything like that.

When I got home the end of '05, I remember not being able to let my guard down. One of the biggest symptoms that I found that I had was hypervigilance and that was something that really came up at night a lot, where I had to go and I had to go through my house and I had to check all the windows again and check the doors and make sure that everything was locked, make sure my kids were in bed, make sure nothing was out of place, and so I found myself getting up several times a night and having to re-go through this routine, even though I knew that I'd already checked it.

The other thing was definitely being out in crowded areas. I wanted to stay home because I knew my family was safe, we were in our house or we were in our yard and that was all a controlled environment, and then to go somewhere where it was something that I couldn't control, we are out in public and there's people everywhere, definitely my anxiety would be a lot higher.

Through time, my sleep schedule and my anxiety was something that I couldn't mask that well and my wife started talking to me about it and saying, and telling me "hey, you need to really figure out what's going on and see about getting some help for this." I was going to a private Doctor and telling him I was having problems with sleeping, I was having problems with anxiety, so I was put on some sleep medication, I was put on some anti-anxiety medication, which really helped.

I was able to get a job, I was an instructor at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, and the office that I worked in was full of Vets that were fresh from deployments. Being around other Vets helped me. Through that process, eventually what happened is I was talking to some friends who said "You need to go to the VA, go talk to them, get some help" and eventually that's what I did, and the VA was able to send me to some counseling. It wasn't a group setting, it was just me and my Therapist, but what I liked about it was that it was a very comfortable situation. As a Vet, you come into these situations and you think others had it worse, why am I in here, I don't want to take up your time. And that's one thing that they really set to rest, they said "We're here for every Vet so, regardless of who had a harder deployment, you're not taking anyone else's spot, we're here for you" and they encouraged me to keep coming back, and so that's what I did.

One of the things that I learned when I was going through counseling is things that triggered my anxiety and how to better control those. For example, watching the news a few hours before bedtime was not a good thing for me and so they helped me with finding those triggers and being able to control my environment more to not have those a part of my environment.

My wife has been instrumental in this. We have very good communication so coming home I was able to be very open with her, tell her how I was feeling and she was able to, not that she could do anything, but she was able to listen, and so through listening and just letting me talk I felt was very therapeutic, but also it was very helpful for her, because she can understand what I was going through.



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Surround yourself with other Vets, get with your buddies, get with other people that have deployments that you click with. It's very therapeutic to be around those who have been through similar experiences and to be able to discuss those experiences together. Going to the VA, being able to connect with people there, really is helpful with that because these are all people that we all have a common thread. We've been through something similar and now we can be there for each other now, too.



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