

The first thing you have to do is take that step

Derek: I am a retired US Army Sergeant and I served in Operation Iraqi Freedom 3 from 2005 to 2006. I took an IED pretty close and have traumatic brain injury and have had several surgeries on my legs.

Basically we got up at 5 o'clock in the morning and we roamed the roads to find IEDs, and that was our job. At one point we were headed underneath a bridge coming back from BIOP after lunch. The call came over in the net "Don't come under the bridge, don't come under the bridge." Well, our medic stopped right beside the IED, we backed up about 100 meters or so, not thinking that it was nearly the size that it was, and it threw me around the gunner's turret pretty hard when it detonated.

I started finding it very difficult to discuss what had actually happened, and when we started doing PT again my legs started swelling up when I would run, and so I had to have fasciotomies done to release all the pressure in the compartments and then, slowly but surely the migraine headaches and insomnia and changes in mood and pleasure and things that I used to enjoy I didn't enjoy nearly as much as I used to. All that kind of just started to come flood in, and when that started to happen was when I realized, okay, there's a bigger problem and I need to get some help.

It came to the realization that I needed help when it was so hard to push suicidal thoughts out of my mind that I would wake up and I would think about suicide, I would sleep for my two hours a night and I would dream about suicide. I would go to bed thinking about suicide and you get to a certain point where you're walking along and you're looking at trees going well, this would be a good tree or that would be a good tree or — the pain just gets to be so dynamic and so diverse that you don't really know how to proceed from there.

The first place I turned was actually inward. Turned to God and said, "You didn't make me like this so why am I like this?" And then I went to the post's doctor and started kind of discussing what was going on, and that's when we discovered that I had PTSD, and they did lots of other tests and came up with TBI and major depressive disorder. Where I could once look at my mom in the eyes and tell her I loved her, I couldn't do that anymore, and it really destroyed a lot of, I guess, just the way that I interacted with my family. The Vet Center helped out and utilizing just different resources that are available in the community, talking with my pastor and talking with the folks at the VA and using the VA crisis line for those nights when it's just you sitting alone in the house.

One of my hardest things was getting past the point of saying "Okay, you know, I'm going to handle this by myself," and saying, "I really need some help for this," the first thing that you have to do is actually take that step, talk to somebody, It's way too easy. Take that first little step and swallow your pride just a little bit and admit that you're human and talk to somebody.



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