

Be proactive and reach out for help

Mike: My name is Mike. I served in the Marine Corps on active duty from 2001 to 2005 and was a Mobilized Reservist from 2008 to 2010. I was a military working dog handler. My dog, his name was Rex. Rex and I got attached to 2nd Battalion 2nd Marines which operated in an area called Mohammedia and also Fallujah and our job was to find and locate IEDs. I had a whole plan in order. I was gonna do the fence contract and then go back overseas, but I found out that the last patrol that I was supposed to go on, my dog and I were loaded in the vehicle. We were about to go on patrol and we got yanked at the last second, and on that patrol, my vehicle that I would've been in, went over an IED and was blown up. The shrapnel went through my seat and went through Rex's seat. The other marines in the vehicle were wounded pretty bad but they survived. My buddy who was in that vehicle, he kept a video camera on the dashboard and after they got hit, he took it off. After he shook himself off, he took it off and videotaped the vehicle, videotaped the IED, put it on a DVD and sent it to me months after I got home.

When I watched that video, it just hit me. Like I was ready to go back to work and I just realized that's not what I want to do. Right after I got out, one of my best friend was a dog handler. He was killed. He was letting me live in his room and his apartment to help maintain it while he was deployed, and so I went back to his place and I helped his brother clean out his room. As I was helping his brother clean out the room, you know, it just kind of hit me, like I don't know, everything was just kind of hitting me at that time. Like I just got out. I just saw that I missed being blown up. My best friend just got killed. I was just in a dark place because I realized I was kind of suppressing it. I just knew on my own that I was suppressing that stuff. I just needed someone to talk to. And just let all of that. Get it all aired out. That's really all I needed. Was just someone to vent to and talk about the feelings and experiences I had gone through.

So I went to the VA in Long Beach and thankfully the counselor that I talked to she was really, really nice, and I don't know, I just feel like I connected with her right away. The VA offers individual, group, and all these great programs and resources. Veterans go through all this training and they go through all this experience and they want to feel that they're not just physically tough, but they're also mentally tough, and so that there can be a negative stigma in reaching out to get some kind of help mentally. But you know, if you get injured physically, you have no problem going out to get help. There's not even a second thought. It's like "Hey I'm hurting. I need to so see the doctor." Well mentally it should be the same way. For any Veteran out there that is thinking about getting help, you just have to be proactive in reaching out for it. And there's really no shame in doing it. It's there for you to reach out to. Don't feel like you're taking advantage of anything. You should be taking advantage of it because you earned the right to do that.



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