

Transitions can be more challenging than expected

Ash: My name is Ash. I was in the Air Force for about 11 years starting 2001 to 2006 Active Duty and the Reserves from 2006 to currently. I got out in 2007 and I actually went from Active Duty to the Reserves. I left Afghanistan and had ten days in-country before I had to be in my first day of class. That was a hard transition because in the Air Force, when you move to a place, you always have something or someone that's gonna meet you or say something or point you in the right direction. Civilian life is not necessarily like that. You have to kinda make those connections on your own.

I started to isolate myself because the built-in military community wasn't there. I felt like I didn't have anything in common with a lot of the students that I was in class with. I just worked. I compiled everything and anything I could do on top of it so that when I went home, I was so exhausted all I did was go to sleep. But then even that became impaired. Sleeping was a problem and then I realized that you can't work all the time. At that point I realized I didn't have any relationships and that's all because of the fact that I was working so much.

One of the things that I did was I called Military OneSource. It's a military-sponsored way to get counseling sessions for whatever issue that you're dealing with. I used to promote that to my troops and at one point, I realized that I needed to do that, and it helped actually a lot. It helped a lot.

It's weird to talk to someone and realize that usually it's actually probably the simple fact that you need to talk this out. That it'll be beneficial. She got to some issues that I didn't even know that I was dealing with. That maybe the cause of me...because I thought it was just the fact that I was isolating myself. I was like, I don't know why I'm isolating myself. What's going on? And she actually helped me get to the underlying issue. A few things I did struggle with was, one, being homosexual and not necessarily being able to tell anyone that.

It was maybe a year later that I ended up seeing someone else. For some reason I couldn't focus on any of my school work and I didn't understand why, other than I was like having maybe life issues but I didn't feel like it was like something that I should be so stressed out about. I stopped caring about my grades, I stopped caring to go to school, to go to class, and at that point I realized I was like wait, my goals are not going to be able to be achieved. I need to go see somebody because there's something I'm not paying attention to.

For me, one of the benefits of counseling is that they are able to either, one, see things that I'm not seeing or they are able to just through talking it out, I will then have an epiphany about, oh, oh, okay, this is how this is tied together. One of my issues was sense of self. So I went from a military family, and I grew up in a military family, and all I did was I did what my parents expected of me. I went into the military and then I did what my superiors expected of me and the plan that was laid ahead of me.

Getting out, transitioning from that, and then trying to figure out, okay, what do I actually like? Actually finding out the things that I enjoy doing on a regular, every day basis, finding out at least me, sexuality-wise, accepting myself as being homosexual simply because I'm okay with it and not denying it because everyone else isn't. So now I can



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be me, I can enjoy life period. I can do school, I can be focused on that, I know the direction which I want to go.

We live in a community, especially in the military, we all live in a community where we are doing things because other people can get hurt if we don't do that. If we remember that us helping ourselves will actually help everyone else, then we can actually pull each other up at the same time.



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