

Army Veteran finds hope in her young daughter

Nicole: My name is Nicole. I served in the Army for 10 ½ years. I deployed to Afghanistan, Iraq, Guantanamo Bay and Africa. When I got to Afghanistan, I got there in April; I hadn't spoken or seen my daughter in six months. You know, she was with her grandparents; it was my first time leaving her for that length of time. Her father and I had divorced two years before that and I was a single parent. So, it was really hard to get adjusted and it was really hard being away from her and I realized that I was struggling when I actually had thoughts of killing myself. That's how miserable I was.

So, I decided to go to my commander; he sent me to the chaplain; the chaplain referred me to mental health. And I would go see a psychiatrist maybe once or twice a week depending on his availability. He just basically let me vent. He asked questions, you know, "What are you feeling right now?" Now that I've gotten the help that I needed, you now, I said, "I'm feeling a lot better." I said, "I feel like I'm not being judged." And I think that's what I was afraid of.

I was actually on my way to the gate to escort some bankers from the Afghanistan International Bank to replenish the ATM. During that time there were three suicide bombers that detonated at the front gate. The explosion actually made my ears bleed. There was a little building where they kept the water; you know that almost hit me. You could see body parts everywhere. Luckily, we didn't sustain any fatalities just minor injuries but that was really scary being that close because when you deploy you think, "Oh, I have a desk job. I don't have to worry about all this stuff." And it's like, no. I thought that if they got through, I thought that we could possibly die and I wouldn't see my little girl again; that was the scary part.

When I got back to Bragg, we all were required to get a mental eval and that's when I was diagnosed with PTSD and adjustment disorder. That was really hard for me and especially explaining it to my family cause my grandma' old school, you know, she really didn't believe it that sort of thing. She's like, "Oh, you'll be fine, you know shake it off." This isn't something you can shake off. I noticed when I came back that I'm not really fond of large crowds of people. I have to know where the exits are at all times. I don't like my back facing the door. But I do have a doctor that I can see that's down the street; I've been to see him twice.

So, if I need to see him see I can make an appointment but the sessions he just allowed me to rant and vent and cry and you know sometimes that's just what I need. I definitely have my ways of keeping things under control. I've developed hobbies, crafting; I like to write; sometimes paint. I find that those are very therapeutic. Or just occasionally taking **Amina** to the park; teaching her how to ride her bike or teaching her something new. I find peace in that.

Whether you think you have an issue or not, go see someone. Keep a diary if need be. Going to the VA is free; if nothing's wrong with you that's totally fine but some people don't do that and they end up hurting themselves or someone else when it could have been prevented. So, if you can prevent these things seek help. There's no shame in it, it just shows that you're strong enough to face what you're dealing with and you don't have to do it alone.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**