

Breaking the Cycle

Joey: My grandfather was a radio operator on a B-24 in World War II. He came back and was very abusive to my dad. He clearly had a lot of very severe PTSD. The catalyst for me to get therapy in the first place was one day after coming back from Afghanistan, my son was probably like three at the time, and I went upstairs to tell him to go to bed. And when I walked in, he covered himself like I was going to hit him, and I'd never touched my children. My symptoms would've been that I was very irritable. I didn't like people. I didn't like people being around me, and I think that's why my son's reaction was to be afraid of me. That kind of was a wake up call. I didn't want to ignore it to the point where I ended up being like my grandfather. I didn't want to repeat that cycle, so I sought therapy the next day, actually.

Joey, Navy. My MOS is the rate in the Navy and that's Master at Arms, and I served from 2002 to 2015. I joined the Navy kind of on a whim. I felt like I wasn't doing much and I wanted my parents to be proud of me. I wanted my dad to be proud of me, honestly. When I served, I got deployed as a individual augmentee to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and I got forced extended there several times. I was there for almost two years. It just challenged my humanity in a real big way.

My mental health journey started in 2012 when I returned from Afghanistan. I've been fortunate enough to find doctors that fit who I am and help me. I got assigned a psychiatrist and a psychologist, and my psychologist was another naval officer. He was great. He was very down-to-earth, let me speak like a normal human. And then I was assigned a psychiatrist to talk about medication, and she also lets me just vent sometimes, which is great. It's been identified through all of my doctors that the PTSD and the initial trauma began in Guantanamo Bay, and I left there in 2007. I meet once a week with my talk therapist, and I meet once a month with my psychiatrist.

I think it's important to have that because we often believe that once things feel okay that we've got it under control, but it's nice to have those check-ins because it's a third party perspective. It used to be that I would just kind of zone out. I'd just fall into a weird trance. Now it's more like I know the feeling when they're coming and I know what does it, and I try to breathe through it and think of a different way to handle it.

My kids typically live with their mother and they come visit me for the summer. I think allowing them to be kids out in nature, away from all their devices and just with their family, and we laugh and have a good time and play games, I think those bonding moments are very important. We're the superheroes to our kids, regardless of if we want to believe it or not. So if they see you accepting help, then they'll see that example and they'll follow it, and they'll be able to maybe reach out to you as a dad or to somebody else to get help before something bad happens.

If you're not sure, reach out to a veteran service organization or find a veteran that you know and just talk about it. I think it's important to share your stories so that others



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don't feel alone, and maybe it empowers them to engage in what they're feeling and what they're going through. And if it reaches one person that feels the same way that I feel and they seek help, then it's all worth it.



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