

Successful ways to deal with pain and stress

Sean: My name is Sean. I served with the Army and the Arizona National Guard, with 4 deployments in Afghanistan.

The worst mission, is the mission for me that never happened. I was dismounting off the back of the truck, we had finished our mission, I hit just right and broke my ankle. It was a fracture. This one mission came up and they were taking all of the teams out, it was a big deal, it was a hot mission, and I wasn't allowed to go on that mission because of my cast. I was all set to go, but the doctor saw me coming out, getting all geared up and stuff to go, and he pulled me off the mission, he yelled at my platoon sergeant, and so the mission went out without me, and Michael was blown up in the truck. He still had his whole life in front of him, and he was the driver of the truck that ran over the IED and took his life.

I deployed at age 36, so I saw things in a much different perspective than say a 19, 20 year old. I had been with my wife at that point for 12 years, and then all of a sudden I am deploying to Afghanistan.

I was going through stuff at home as well, where my wife had some odd behavior, the kids were telling me about things that were going on that just didn't make sense, bank account issues that didn't make sense. Come to find out, she basically had thrown all of my stuff out in the alley, and had found somebody else, plus drug addiction. So at that point, I realized that the best place for me to be was to stay in Afghanistan. I still had a great job with the state, but I had lost my family and everything that was important to me.

So I just kept redeploying. So you had that crap, that crap that was going on at home to manage, and then on top of that you had friends getting killed. So they broke up my team and they said, "Alright, what do you want to do? This is your fourth deployment." And I was like, "You know, I think it's time for me to go home."

In Marin County, everything is much smaller. So the grocery store, for instance, the grocery store in Arizona would be huge, acres. A grocery store in San Rafael, California would be much smaller, much more compact, and people on top of you, people touching you, people bumping you, people nudging you, people coming up from behind and reaching over you. It just freaked me out. I had so many bad headaches. All of a sudden I would have, not fits or bursts, but just start balling, and it would just be like over the top.

I ended up going to the VA the next business day. I went and reported to the OEF/OIF social workers, and they said, "Come on in." They chatted with me. They started making phone calls. They set up an orientation that day. I got to help figure out what was going to be the best for me, so I said, "I don't want to do groups, so I'll just do individual." So I did individuals for a long time. It doesn't always have to be a Vet that you're dealing with like at the VA. It can be somebody who just deals with nothing but Veterans, who deal with PTSD. Just because they didn't walk in your shoes doesn't mean they can't sit there and say, "Hey, this is what I have been learning from talking to other Veterans who are suffering like you."



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So a lot of it was talking about situations that had affected me that I carried home with me. Talking about how that translates into civilian life. It taught me how to just slow down, relax, rewind, stop, study, and move.

They started this thing called the pain clinic at the VA. It brings in somebody who deals with pain management and different types of pain, and they sit there and they talk to you about how you're stressed, your levels of stress are affecting, like in my case, my neck and my upper back, and down my arms and hands. They talked to me about how stress, increased stress, is affecting me. She taught me different breathing practices, different ways to exit a situation without looking like you're running from it, to not only just escape without a confrontation, but to not feel like you have to be in a confrontation.

I just feel more sure of myself. I feel like I am more safe.

If you've got issues, and you're not addressing them, you need to go talk to somebody. The VA, the Vet Centers, any one of them, anybody, just anybody, just talked to somebody and work through it. It can be done.



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