

## Counseling helped him take control of his life

**James:** My name is James. I was in the Army. I served in Afghanistan and Iraq. I worked with the Army Corp or Engineers, the Gulf Region North District. When I was in Afghanistan obviously, anytime you leave a base, things can happen, but I never actually was shot at. I felt the anxiety, but I never saw the actual trauma. So, there's I guess two levels here. There's the trauma of guys who've been shot at, who have been hurt, who've had close friends right next to them hurt. Then there's a second level of people who were all out there, it could happen to anybody. So, when you leave the base you don't know if you're going to be hurt. You don't know, so you battle that every day. I've battled that anxiety definitely as did my family when I left.

My first deployment, I returned to Hawaii. It was actually pretty surreal. I went from a very, very remote area in Afghanistan, the first day I got back I was in Waikiki in a hotel looking out on the city on a balcony seeing the ocean, and it was bizarre. It takes a little bit of time, just that part of it. The fact that you were in such a completely different environment, forget about the threat and what can happen to you, just they are two different worlds.

I don't know that I had a lasting anxiety about my deployment. I was definitely going through some relationship issues. I was married when I was on active duty. I went back to school. I just tried to focus on my program. I met a lot of amazing people there, so I was just trying to focus on a lot of positive things that were happening. I finished my program, things still weren't working, so I decided to move to Boston. At that point, we were pretty much formally separated. I started working, this was my first civilian job because I had been in the Army straight out of college and I think I'd been at work for about three months and then I got a letter in the mail saying welcome back to the Army, you report to Fort Benning on this day which was pretty surprising, it was not a welcome surprise, and that pretty much was the end I think of my marriage.

We did relationship counseling, marriage counseling, sought individual counseling, but I think there was just kind of a fracture for her that she couldn't overcome at the time. There was a pretty significant delay between the time that I first got orders and the time that I deployed. During that time I knew it was going to be a challenging year. I sought out a civilian Counselor and just worked through some of these issues.

I had actually used Army programs when I returned from Afghanistan. It was basically a free counseling, you know go find a Counselor in Honolulu, a civilian Counselor and I used that. I had a pretty positive experience. I decided that worked. I need to work on just building strength mentally for this deployment. I was pretty meticulous with following the process to be finally discharged, I did that.

During that process, I once again used the Army program. They offered, I think, two or three months of counseling and I think I was better for it. Just talking through some issues, getting an idea of how I felt about things, working through some transitions.

When you come back and you hadn't had that traumatic experience, you feel like, well I don't deserve this counseling. I don't need this counseling. You're kind of raised in the Army to just deal, to just work through issues, to fight through issues, you don't dwell on them.



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE  
CONNECTION**

You move on which is fine on an everyday basis, but at some point you've got to tackle those problems. You just can't be the tough guy all the time and in fact, I kind of feel like by being the tough guy you're placing a burden on people around you that really need you to get back up to speed, get through that transition, move on. Be a part of your family, rejoin the work force. Everybody's got a different way of dealing with stress. Some people it's your family, sometimes it's your friends. Some people feel more comfortable talking to someone more objective you know, a Counselor or someone not within their circle. You just have to identify who that person or who that group is and you gotta lean on them. You cannot try to do it alone and it's really, it's on you. You gotta do that eventually. Your friends, family, can help you as much as you want, but you got to take the initiative and do that, seek out help.

I've managed to move on and develop my career. I re-married, we're actually expecting a child in September. I was able to move on. I feel really fortunate.



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE**  
**CONNECTION**