

After counseling, their marriage was stronger

Stephanie: My name is Stephanie; I'm married to Travis. He is an OIF Veteran. He served three tours in Iraq; was preparing for his fourth when he was injured and medically discharged. It's not easy, you have to be pretty independent. You have to be strong; you have to be supportive. You have to be pretty intelligent to get through some of the stuff that **goes** through but it's the most rewarding job I've ever had, aside from being a parent. It's my way of supporting our country.

It wasn't my first deployment going through with him. Discipline was much easier because I knew what to expect, but you always have those things that come up that you don't plan for; all those thoughts and feelings like, "Are you sure your marriage is good enough to last; survive this? Are you sure you're strong enough to survive if something happens to them?" It's nerve racking. We talked as much as possible; I wrote letters to him when I couldn't talk to him. I just wanted to tell him something and I'd write him a letter telling him everything that I could. I never mailed them to him. I gave them to him when he got back, that way he had something to look forward to when he got home.

I relied a lot on my other military spouses; my FRG was really important to me. FRG, the Family Readiness Group, and it's basically just other military spouses that are same unit, same group. So, they're all pretty much deployed together. So, if you have questions you go the commander's wife, you've the sergeant's wife; you've got the whole chain of command's spouses there.

I noticed gradually he was getting angrier and more withdrawn and when we'd go out in public, he'd get real tense and he'd start looking around. And he just gets irritated because something little happens and I'm like, "That wasn't that big of a deal." You just pick up on it every now and then and then it was like, "Something's not right." We argued quite a bit and I said, "You need to go get help." And as most veterans, as far as I can tell, "No, I don't need help, I have got this; it's fine."

And I think one day it finally hit him. He didn't want to argue; he didn't want to be one of those couples that just never got along. So, finally I think it was initially just to shut me up he said, "Okay, I'll go." He said, "I'm just going to sit there; I'm just going to listen." And he probably went six weeks and just sat there and listened to everybody and I think that kind of triggered for him, "Look, they've got similar stories. They're going through the same thing; I can talk about this."

He's realized how important it is to talk about it. He doesn't feel so alone. If you know you have somebody who's going to stand by you no matter what; I think he's realized that's the best feeling. He found little ways to tell me things and then I'd asked more questions and he'd share more and that only made us stronger. We've actually gone to marriage counselling with the Vet center and they've given us some homework assignment kind of things, like, write how you feel your communication skills are and write this and that. We compare them and we get our dialogue opened up about how we felt about things, so we could talk when we got home.

I just think everybody should know that seeking help doesn't mean that you can't do it, it means that you're human. You need to find other people and we all need other people; we can't do it on our own. It will make your life so much better in the long run; make your children's lives better; make your spouses... It affects everybody around you. You



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