

## Marine turned firefighter takes charge

**Sam:** My name is Sam. I was in the Marines from 2008 to 2012. I was a 0352. It's a two gunner. And I was also a 0311 as a scout. My first appointment was at 19 to Afghanistan. After the first appointment everything's so surreal. When we lost our first guy and then the second and third and then you start seeing the suicides happening, you kind of have to experience it for yourself to realize that it's real.

There is no, really no pathway. You kind of get out and that's it and you got to really figure out what you want to do. One day you're totally fine with what you're doing and the choices you're making, the next day you're not. You're watching all your buddies going through the same thing and it seems like everyone is kind of lost.

It's that mix of depression, anxiety, anger, the unwillingness to kind of keep going. It's that mix of emotions that really takes effect. But, yeah, it got to a point with the anxiety and anger that it was just getting worse.

When I first started going and seeking help, it was after my first relationship ended. I forced myself to be more angry at the fact that everything happened the way it did instead of trying to work through it or evaluate it in some sort of way. So, it was definitely a very low point. And that's pretty much when I decided to go start talking to someone.

I was going to school to be a firefighter. So, I was just getting a physical. I went over to mental health and I had to get an appointment there as well. I knew that there was an outreach center right down the road from where I live, so they just set me up in an appointment there.

The good thing about the outreach center is you don't really need a referral or anything. You can just walk in and set something up or just ask to talk to someone. But you have to seek it. I sat down with the director of that outreach center and just asked pretty general questions, anything you would get at a normal job or going really anywhere. Just basic info. And then he just went through the process of you can...we have a team here. You can talk with someone. If you don't feel that you're connecting with them, you can go to whoever else you're comfortable with.

I started out doing it once every 2 weeks. I was working part-time and going to school full-time, so I started doing it once a month. I think it was just talking about what you were going through and then hearing what they had to say kind of from a third-party that really has no idea about your life or who you really are, I think that's what helped the most. And still does.

What I've realized is that sense of purpose, you can take and place in a variety of ways. I teach at a fire academy and being able to give that mentorship or that guidance to people coming through, that's what helps me the most. When it comes to getting help, they're not going to knock on your door. So, you have to, you have to make that step or do that walking.



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