

Finding support through therapy and telemedicine

Don: My names Don. I served 8 years with the Marine Corp active duty from 1991 to 1999 and I was stationed mainly on the East Coast. I did 2 years in Okinawa and I also went on ship and so, I got to see Europe and then I had about a 9-year gap, and I went into the National Guard from 2009 to 2012 with Military Police units.

When I got out in 99, I went through a marriage, but I was having nightmares of my troops even though I'd never been in a combat situation. We'd be sitting there having a drink and the next thing you know heads are exploding near me and panic sets in and I never realized it, that it was part of depression, PTSD.

Sitting in rooms, I like to see doors, windows, know everything that's coming on, movement, I automatically look, driving I'm always in my mirrors looking around. I think it's a combination of the training I had and the stress and the environment and not really having the adaptation, the transition coming out. There was no help when you got out. It was just, here to you go, here's your DD214, your gone, get out, bye, see ya.

Years later, I ended up living in New Hampshire and I got my first divorce and I felt like I wasn't going to amount to anything, I wasn't going to see my kids, my life was ending. So, I put a gun to my chest and before I pulled the trigger I thought about my boys and I went and checked myself into a civilian hospital, counseling for about 8 months with them.

I moved back down to Massachusetts in 2008 and started using the VA and met up with a Psychiatrist that was an Army Veteran and a Psychologist that's an Army Veteran. So, there was a rapport. They could see my side of it where I was coming from. So, I got a bond going. It's been a great time using the TeleMed, teleconference TeleMed where I sit in front of a video screen, it's like Skyping and the Psychiatrist is in another VA and we just sit there and go back and forth for an hour. And then, I get to see face-to-face with the Psychologist whenever I need it. It's like we're at about every 2 months at this point now.

Some of the things that I've gotten that work out for me during these conferences with the TeleMed or the face-to-face is you self-reflect. You can explain what's going on, how you feel and they explain ways of coping with it. My psychologist Toby actually took me out in the hallway during one of the sessions and was like, why don't we do this, I'm going to walk down the hallway and I'm going to be those voices in your head telling you the stress voices. What you're worrying about and I'm just going to rattle stuff off and I want you to just to act like your on a bus and you're driving the bus and they keep coming up and talking to you and you just tell them to sit back and go sit down and it was just like, wow something so simple to handle something so big. It was just weird how it just worked.

My whole situation started with going through a divorce and we were behind on rent and we couldn't keep up with rent. I went to my Veterans Service Officer in my town and he directed me to a program in the VA and I worked with the homeless program there and they ended up putting me in a shelter. My son was 2 years old at the time when I went into the shelter. So, through the homeless shelter and the VAST program I actually got into the vocational rehab program at the VA. So, now I'm in college to pick up my social working degree. You have a counselor right at the VA that helps you out. They help pay



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for your school, if not pay for all of it. Anything you need for school, depending on your situation, and how much you qualify for it. I can go through school and pick up my master's degree and go all the way through a master's degree through one of the approved programs.

Your first step to anything is realizing there's something wrong and not trying to conquer it yourself. You're going to be the one pushing forward and making the results, but you need somebody there to guide you and help you, somebody that's dealt with it before and I've been through homelessness. I've been through suicide attempts and you can turnaround. You can change. It's just you got to just keep trying. You can't let it get you down.



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