

## I'm a better husband and a better father now

**Matt:** My name's Matt. I was in the United States Air Force for just shy of ten years. I was a 2W171 when I got out, which basically is a weapons loader for the fighter jets. Loading bombs and loading missiles is a lot of manual labor. Over the nine years that I was in, I developed spinal degenerative disease, and one day, my back just blew out. The last year and a half I was in, I was kind of riding a desk doing some paperwork type stuff, and then they separated me medically. The couple years after I got out were very depressing. It was lack of motivation. It was a lot of isolation. I didn't want to do anything with anybody. I personally felt worthless. I was married, but I had a daughter with a previous marriage, and you know I pay support, and I was wondering how I was gonna support her? How I was gonna support any future kids that my wife and I were wanting to have? I just felt useless.

We bought this little store and ran that for about a year, and I was drinking heavily. I was still really depressed. The store wasn't making any money. It was slowly rotting away, eating away at any money that we had saved up, and we ended up having to close the store, and that was probably the low point of my life. It was...I felt like a failure in the Air Force, and I felt like a failure in the civilian world. We lost our car, and we ended up losing our home because of it. The only time I'd ever seriously considered killing myself was at this time. It was the worst of everything. My wife said, "We need to get help. You need to get help." You know, obviously, dying isn't gonna to solve any problems.

So, I went to the VA, and I got hooked up with a psychiatrist and got on some medication, and that took a little bit of time, but I started feeling a little bit better. I started noticing that my environmental problems were still there, but I had a different outlook on looking at them. I felt increased motivation. I felt increased desire to get out of bed, to get out of the house, to go look for jobs, to go fill out applications. Whereas before, I just felt defeated from the beginning. I have a counselor, an individual counselor, I see every single Wednesday, and I also have a counselor, a separate counselor, that I see a little less often every couple of months on the weekends. That's through the VA. It's a nice program they have setup for people that are working.

My wife and I, we were struggling there for a little while. So, we went through this program, and the program was geared toward strengthening family bonds, and it was very helpful for us. I learned not only to be a better husband, but a better father to my children. We still have our challenges, like I said, but we have our resources in place, and those challenges never become overwhelming anymore. When we deal with them, we have the tools that we need to deal with them, and we don't let them take over anymore. So, life is good.

The biggest thing I learned is everybody struggles at some point or another. There are ways to combat those feelings of isolation. There are ways to combat those feelings of lack of motivation. There are ways to combat the depression or anxiety in general. There's specialists out there for every part of your body. If you have cancer, certainly you're going to go to an oncologist and get help. It's the same with mental health issues. So, it's just a matter of asking for that help and not being ashamed to say, "Hey, you know, there's something not quite right here." It's amazing what they can do.



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