

## Counseling opened new doors

**Jason:** My name is Jason. I joined the Marine Corp when I was 17, and I went to boot camp in California and my job was a jet mechanic on the CH-53's. My Marine Corp life was short-lived. I went to the Army National Guard shortly after. I was active duty in the Marine Corp, but I wasn't deployed Marine Corp, I was just stationed in Hawaii, and I was deployed twice in the National Guard.

Our main mission in Iraq was dismounted patrols. We were in the southwest part of Baghdad, one of my friends died, and it's sad. I mean, he was hit with an RPG. He was a father. He was a husband. He was friends with my wife. He was friends with my family. We were all close, and it changed. It will change people. You know, seeing your best friend lose his life for other people you know, it's hard to swallow and right after I got home, I totally disassociated myself with everybody that I knew. I couldn't even go home. I rented a hotel for probably 2 months because I just didn't feel comfortable around anybody. I couldn't drive anywhere. I couldn't be around people. I didn't trust anybody, and I became an alcoholic.

One of my friends in my unit noticed a problem and he told me that I needed to get help or he was going to tell my leadership and I ignored it and I ignored it, and finally he said, "You're going to get help," and he took me to the VA.

I was diagnosed with PTSD and alcoholism, but I didn't believe it. I knew that I had drank. I knew that I would go to the liquor store every day and buy a 5th of Crown, but I didn't realize that, that was a sign of an alcoholic, and I would drink it up and the next day I'd go buy another one and I'd drink it up, and the whole time I would drive back and forth and not put any thought to anyone else's life that I was putting at risk, with medication and counseling I got help. I realized that I did have a problem. I stopped drinking cold turkey, just quit. I couldn't do it to myself anymore. It was going to kill me and possibly others.

First, whenever I began therapy it was one-on-one with just me and the therapist. He wanted me to start going into group therapy and I was telling him no I don't want to start seeing group because then I have to express my feelings to everybody and I'm not down with that but he talked me into it one time and then I went and I see a couple guys there that I knew and after we got to talking and things started going a little bit better and I noticed a change in myself. I felt like I wasn't the only one out there that was having problems and I actually knew someone that was having the same issue that I was.

Counseling and coping for me was like opening another door. You could either choose to go down the same path and possibly ruin your life or you could go into another door and correct the mistakes that you've made and make a better life. I mean, now I'm in college. Now, I'm working on my Bachelor's degree and I have a possibility of making something of myself, and now I've been sober for 4 years. I don't have the thirst for alcohol. I don't disassociate myself with anything. I can face my problems. The VA has really helped me out a lot with school and my wife has really helped me a lot at home. Soon, we are expecting a baby in October so, I'm really excited. I've got a lot to look forward to.

You can get counseling anywhere. You can get counseling through the VA. You can get counseling through your chain of command. You can get counseling through your



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own avenues. The main focus is you go get counseling if you need it, it's out there. I know what it's like to lose one of your best friends, and I know what it's like to go talk about it. You don't want to talk about it, you don't want to think about it, but you've got these visions and you've got these nightmares and you just want them all to go away, and they won't go away until you talk about them and that's when they start going away because you have to let them out and that's the first step of therapy is you talk about it.

And, I feel like a totally different person now that I got help, and I encourage every Vet that feels the same way to get help.



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