

Go for it: Take that first step

Jeffrey: I've just always wanted kids, so we have Jamie, nine, Naomi's six, and then we have Annika who's four. They're great. They just love to be out and active. My name's Jeffrey, I'm in the Army National Guard, I served overseas in 2010, 2011, and my occupational specialty is 92 Yankee. So I've always been in gymnastics. The one really good thing that my birth mother did for me was train me in gymnastics. My wife found the gym that I teach at because they do what's called an open gym and the kids could play for free.

Cora: My name is Cora, I've been married to Jeffrey for almost seven years now. Around the time that I met Jeff he wasn't sleeping, he'd limited self-care. He was also just really guarded, not, like, in an in touch with his emotions way but, like, avoiding emotions sensitive way.

Jeffrey: Oh man, yeah, I've been shot at, I've been blown up, we've been mortared, rocketed. The first one affected me the worst. We were on what we called, like, our ring of fire mission because we got hit all the damn time, and I turned my turret and I'm, like, "Hey, there's something—" boom! And it just blew up and it was pretty bad. It knocked me unconscious. Yeah, it was, it was a wreck. After the infantry I moved up to Montana, went to the National Guard unit and the 495th. It was really hard, it was—the transition back, like, my friends who could never scare me before, I wasn't a jumpy person, like, they totally could scare me, like. I found out later that I hurt my back, which is—the VA's still, you know, helping with, and, you know, my short-term memory is just screwed up now too, so.

Cora: I know that there was the one time where he was just in desperation, and I don't even remember how we got to that point.

Jeffrey: I had a really terrible past, and then I had a really tough time overseas too, like, if it wasn't for my wife I wouldn't be here. I almost committed suicide over this because it was such a mess. I don't know what it was that my wife saw, but she noticed something, and she took all my weapons and she didn't think about the keys, and, like, I noticed that there was no weapons around, looking, she's like, "No, you need to call your therapist, you need to actually do something. Don't run from this, this is...this is a permanent solution to a temporary problem." Like, so I did a little bit of research and the vet center seemed like the best bet and it made me feel a little bit more secure in going to see them. I found out later that I had PTSD, TDI, GAD which is general anxiety disorder. It's hard to find someone that you're going to trust to open up with. The first two people I went to, I tried for two or three sessions and I was just, like, it didn't feel right, it didn't feel comfortable, I didn't feel like this is someone that can hear my story. You don't have to be afraid to walk out and be like "I'm sorry, I can't work with you, but I'm going to continue to look for someone who I can work with," and I feel finding someone who you're comfortable with is definitely key to healing and progression and there's someone out there.

Cora: It's only been just recently in the past year or two where his work on himself in his therapy has actually been noticeable to the rest of us.

Jeffrey: I wanted to better myself so that my daughter didn't have to live with the person that was so explosive, and that was the main reason. Like, once it was pointed out I was



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like, “Ooh, I don’t want my daughter to grow up around that,” and so I went and helped better myself.

Cora: It’s difficult because, you know, they’ve learned to try to understand and compensate and be considerate, you know, like, they know, like, Dad’s mad, Dad’s loud, Dad’s mad and loud but it’s not about me, so I’m just going to come and hang out by Mom because I’m nervous if Dad’s loud. You know, they’re still learning to adjust to his new skills.

Jeffrey: I found out through my therapist that anything that works both sides of your brain like gymnastics and dance, and I’ve been recently taking hip-hop lessons to keep active and learning and it has helped a lot. They got me started on something called EMDR. The main way to do it is they’ll hold something up and you’ll talk about your troubling past like that soldier that died, and you’ll have to follow it with your eye while you’re talking, and it helps regulate your right side and your left side of the brain while you’re doing it, and what works best for me is I’ll just go and all—people will think I’ve crossed my arms and I’m tapping both sides while I’m talking about, and usually I’m like this and people just think I’m pissed off, but it’s how I deal with troubling situations to this day now. If you can find programs that get you out there, like, recreational therapies out there, I think because they incorporate your entire family in that process, do it. Those help so much. Those RT events got me out snowshoeing with other vets, they got me out there, they did, like, family board games and stuff like that. You know, go out, socialize. I think that a lot of people should do more social stuff with other people.

Cora: I think doing activities together is kind of what makes you a family. I mean, it’s the effort that you put into it for it being built up into what you want it to be.

Jeffrey: My advice is go for it. Take that first step. Go see someone if you’re even semi-worried about how you’ve been acting around other people. If you think you have to rein yourself in for any reason, go talk to someone, you know, it’s just going to build strength later on.



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