

Family stories of shared support and experiences

Tiffany: As a spouse or a loved one of a soldier, it takes a lot of backbone yourself. I mess up all the time. I say the wrong things constantly because I get frustrated too. I get overwhelmed. I get beat down myself.

Lauri: Moms and dads have the best intentions in the world. I just want my child, my Soldier, to be able to cope and be the child that I remember leaving and that doesn't happen. And so, sometimes you overboard which causes the Soldier to then withdraw further, to go back to what they know, usually their buddies. And sometimes families feel abandoned by that. You were gone for X number of months and you're still not back and it's working the way back into the family and back into the life that becomes a challenge.

Steven: What we were trying to do is when you come back, try to make it normal, but normal doesn't exist. Now, we were having a new normal; trying to address how do we do this? How do we, allow you to blend back in and give you your time and your space and then allow you, to speak when you want to speak? And that's a challenge.

Nicole: When he got back from Iraq, he pulled guard on the window, every thunderstorm for about a year, and just trying to like find each other again and you're dealing with your own stuff and you don't want the family to see what you're dealing with, so you're trying to deal with it by yourself.

Myra: Once Brad came home and Eric came home, there's a sadness there. There is something that was lost and was left behind over there. So, then what I have is the hope that, I don't know, somehow it will get better.

Julie: When he finally told me what was going on, I was horrified that he had been having to go through this much and that's when we were going to the VA. They really made sure that he didn't get off the hook, he didn't get out of the system, he didn't get away and not come back, and that was really a miracle.

Tara: As a spouse or a girlfriend, you feel like you have to be really strong, but in all reality, you're not going to be able to. It's going to be very hard. I went and saw a counselor just three times. It didn't take a lot. I just needed help in identifying some of the things I felt going on inside of me, but it was a huge help. It just opened my eyes to why I was feeling some of the things I was feeling and how I could support him and work through it.

Rebecca: The first time I sat down at one of those group sessions was like this massive relief to be able to feel understood and it was like when I heard those people speaking, it was like looking in the mirror. It was amazing for me, but the most amazing thing that came out of it was, I think for Brian because he didn't think that he needed to come out and talk about his feelings for the umpteenth time. I said to him, "Well, if you talk about it, about your experiences, then it might help other people." And that was true, but I secretly knew that it was actually going to help him.

Tara: Anyone can be supportive, your family, your friends, but what's always lacking is that connection with someone who's going through the exact same thing. There are so many good programs and resources and groups that connect you to other wives, other



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family members going through it and I just think that that is priceless in this type of situation.

Tiffany: And at the end of the day family is what matters. Be strong. Be supportive. Be real. Communicate as well as possible and never lose hope.



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