

Be open and honest with yourself

Ryan: My name is Ryan. I served three years in the United States Army, regular Army. Fort Sill, Oklahoma for three years, from 1997 to 2000. I served under Don't Ask, Don't Tell and I wasn't out technically when I got in. I signed, when I was 17, so turned 18 when I was in the military, and actually came out in the military. It was something you didn't discuss. It was still a little hard, not being able to be open and honest with the people I was working with.

Some of the issues I dealt with, probably before I got out of the military, I noticed, I had gone through some periods of depression, anxiety, I would just notice changes in my own behavior, not doing things that I would typically know to do. Sleeping a lot, just agitated, drinking more, using substances. I don't recall looking for any sort of support or help while I was in, but it definitely came out after I got out of the military.

Although I had a great support group, lots of friends, being a Veteran there are a lot of things that you deal with that typical Civilian and the community just doesn't get. Knowing I could go to the VA and you know, be open, was huge for me.

Once I decided to you know search out help or support through the VA I typically would just, you know, make an appointment with the primary care physician who would meet with me, ask questions about what I was feeling. There is definitely a network of professionals at the VA that work together with your case. They typically would put me in contact with a Behavioral Specialist, a Psychiatrist or Social Worker, someone who would be able to more appropriately work with that issue that I was having. I did participate in some one-on-one individual therapies.

Most recently I actually sought out help for depression, anxiety through the VA and was connected to an Addiction Therapist because I had mentioned that I thought I had issues with binge drinking, over drinking, having something to focus on other than just being sad, or depressed or anxious. Really having something to work with and work through, another tool in your toolbox.

I feel great, I think a part of that for me has always been kind of talking and sharing what I am going through. Being open with myself and others. Having that support group. I have got my father, he is a Vietnam Veteran and he has struggled with bouts of suicide, depression, anxiety as well and through just talking with him about my experience with the VA, good and bad I think it kind of helped open his eyes about this could be something that I could use as well. It worked out for him, he is fully entrenched in the VA. Community and Veteran's organizations so it has actually helped, it has helped a lot. I would suggest to people to just ask questions, be open and honest with yourself and your support group. Try to find a support group, whether that is professionals within the health care system or within the community, your person or circle. Just share with them what you are going through and what you are looking to achieve. There are resources and programs available on all aspects of your being. Whatever your situation might be, there is something out there for you.



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