

Knowing support is there helps every day

Dusty: My name is Dusty. I served in the United States Marine Corp. I was a combat engineer for 1st EB. did one tour in Iraq in 2003, from February to August. My entire job was support. It ended up being more front lines than anything else. You know, in the military, everything is structured. If you don't know the answer, somebody has already given it to you. Reverting back, there is nobody to report to, you're yourself. It's extremely difficult to make that adjustment where you've got to, you're on your own.

When we were there, I mean, you were constantly aware of everything and so vigilant that you can't help but do it now. You know, I've been out six years and I'm still on edge when I drive, when I'm in new places, it gets to you mentally and physically. I was constantly looking behind my shoulder, couldn't sit in a restaurant, you know, without being able to see the exits or the whole restaurant. It's the hopelessness, the stressed out constantly because, by the end of the day you're so tired because you've already done looked at the world 500 times and dissected it 1,000, and you still don't have any answers from when you woke up the first day.

At first, I just figured that I was normal and I was like, "Well, you know, everybody suffers from this." I didn't think I really had a problem. It actually took me having a flashback one night to realize that I had an issue. You know, I figured nightmares and all that stuff, it just kind of treads with the territory. Well, I was wrong. Had a flashback, lost control, don't remember any of it, you know, the whole shebang. I almost went to jail for it, but, you know, that's what kicked me in to going to the VA and looking in for getting help, just because, you know, if I can lose all sense of control of who I am and what I'm all about in an instant, then there's a serious problem. You just feel very hopeless when you're lost like that and the VA was very quick to respond to help me, to get me counseling. They've been there every step of the way. I mean, they've been unbelievable in kind of helping me rehabilitate into society. I've had therapists, I've had caseworkers, and they've all been awesome. You know, me and my wife did group counseling once. You know, she's had it pretty rough. The first year I was out, I didn't know who I was, didn't know how I was going to overcome, and then, you know, it took one bad incident that could've been avoided, you know, because I had pride.

My family was very understanding, my dad, you know, a former Marine. My wife was extremely understanding. She served in the Navy the same time period that I did. I'd have to say that group therapy and being able to talk to somebody that really wants to know what's going on, that really wants to help you, and they're extremely passionate about it. You know, if you're having a bad day, you know, they'll pat you on the back and be like, "Hey, man, it's all right. Let's talk about it." Just knowing that they're there to help helps you every day. I've gotten to the point now where I don't have to see a therapist or psychologist every three months, you know, I go in two, three times a year. If you feel it coming on, don't let it wait until the end when you've already done something that you can't reverse. We fought for this country. We deserve the care that's being provided to us 100%. It does not make you a weaker person. It makes you stronger because you set pride aside to make sure that your health and wellbeing is good.



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