

The biggest help is talking with other soldiers

Casey: My name's Casey. I'm an Army medic. As a medic in your training and everything leading up to you have scenarios and simulations and none of it's the actual real thing and all of what you see are just, little injuries or sicknesses, illnesses that you help treat. After I was in Iraq the pivotal point for me was the first dead body that I'd seen, and he was a US soldier and he didn't die there, a group of guys had captured him and he was held and he was executed, and when they found his body he was still bound and naked, and that was the first dead body I had seen, and that was the first time the realness of the situation I think actually struck me.

Everyone is so happy when you get back from deployment. It's just a bit big celebration, and then after that dies down you start to settle into the realization of you're in everyday life, everyone else around you is in everyday life, and not everyone else has the appreciation of being alive that you just had,

So it's tough because all the things with the transition you get warned about the big things but it's all the subtle things that you can't even know are there until after they start to arise, and when you get back from a deployment you can settle down and things aren't life and death and here there's all this other stress that other people have that you don't feel because you don't feel that it's life or death, and it's tough to relate to because the things that you find serious they don't see as that serious anymore, because in the United States, we don't have those worries. We're pretty secure.

Occasionally someone will ask a Veteran, "Were you deployed?" or "What was it like?" And you kind of just try to gloss it over a little bit and just kind of give a simple, short answer or not get in too much detail because it's tough to talk about, and the hardest time I had was when my mother asked me about it and I couldn't tell her about it. I couldn't tell her about the things I had seen. I felt it was too much to have to tell a mother, like, what her child's going through and the horrors that they've seen in the world, but you know it's there, all the other Veterans who've seen it know it's there, we all know about it but it's not conversation, you just can't talk about it.

We all have trouble with driving because transportation in theater is — any time you're on the move you're vulnerable, so everyone's hyper alert and vigilant and trying to watch out for every little thing that could possibly be a potential threat, and then here driving is just so casual, and there, like, every little piece of trash or debris or anything that's in the road, anything that's out of the ordinary could be an alert, could be something catastrophic, and here everything just happens and there's no issues ever and so it takes a long time to shed that alertness. Once it's there and you depend on it to stay alive, it's really hard to lose it once you've been back.

It's tough because there are a lot of situations where I'm in crowded areas or where there's a lot of chaos and a lot of things happening around me and it's really hard to feel comfortable there sometimes because it stresses you out and you just want to maintain order and try to keep things at a certain distance or keep them at a certain safety from you because it's hard letting yourself be vulnerable, and then when I get out of that situation and it passes I can look back and I just think to myself, "What's wrong with you? What's going on? Like, there's a normal everyday situation, you shouldn't be so worked up by it."



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I had talked with a chaplain a couple times, which helps. I think the chaplains usually give good guidance. I'm not a particularly very religious person or anything but they work with people and they help out in that scenario and they can give you comforting words, and the biggest help that I found really is by talking with other soldiers. What I was going through was normal, that everyone else was going through it too, and that I was just like them. We were all trying to deal with it and that helped the most, that we're a whole community and we're all going through it together.

Transitioning out of the military life in general into civilian life is another situation where they warn you and they prep all they can about it but, you just don't know until you get there that it really sucks. The community in the military, it's just a different mindset, a different community. Everyone knows that "Hey, we're all going to work hard, we're going to take care of each other" and it's a real brotherhood, real family-type environment. We all look out after each other and that's how we work, it's the way it works, and then in civilian world it's all about competition. Everyone, they might work with you but they're the next person to stab you in the back and when you leave the military you have to find a job and then when you're trying to find a job companies aren't like in the military they say, "Okay, we're going to ask a lot of you and you're going to have to do a lot but we're going to take care of you and we're going to help support you and give you everything you need so that you can take care of this job, this task that we've put before you, no matter how tough it is."

In the civilian life it's totally is different. Companies or organizations are more stand back — they're, like, "Well, we will offer you this position and this job but you have to make a lot of sacrifices to do it and if you don't do anything quite right we're just going to let you go and then we'll turn our back on you, basically," and it's, like, you don't feel like you have that support, that safety net. Veterans are very driven, capable people who've done a lot and they can always do a lot and it's tough because employers just don't know. They just don't know how valuable Veterans can be if they were utilized properly.

The biggest challenge you face is feeling alone and feeling like you're going through these issues alone, so it's important to talk to someone and at least find someone else because there's plenty of people who have gone through this before and there's plenty of people to talk to and there's a lot of support and it's of the utmost importance to know that you're not alone.



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