

Finding the positive is part of recovery

Jenny: My name is Jenny. I am the wife of an Army Veteran. His name is Mark and he's from the Iraq war, and he's been home since 07 and came home with a traumatic brain injury and severe PTSD. He had been in the service for 12 years and then was released. He retired and then went to work for a contractor that ended up in Iraq, and through his work there, the general in Iraq wanted him back as a soldier so, he was brought back into military life.

So, that was a bit of a shock because I thought that, that part of our life had ended. When he came home there was a big difference. The first time he came back he was edgy on end, and I didn't take him to the VA at that point, just to our regular doctor who put him on antidepressants. That seemed to calm him down, then he went back and then the last time he came home with the injuries it was very different. He was quiet. He was withdrawn. He would sweat a lot. He would hide, wouldn't get up, wouldn't leave the house. It was very isolating. I didn't know really what was happening. I just knew something was wrong and I needed help so, I drug him to the VA, and he's been there ever since. We've been introduced to different counselors, whether it was marriage counseling, whether it was learning how to cope with PTSD and TBI, they've now put us in a program here at the Cincinnati VA called TRAC, and it's like an umbrella of services for mental health.

The depression is very easy to fall into. There are times where we just as a caregiver and especially in our life, I've had to take on every roll, not only the caregiver but I'm also the financial planner, the social planner, every aspect, I'm the transportation, falls on my shoulders. So, that plate is really, really full so, there are times where it gets a little bit overwhelming. So, it's really kind of nice being able to talk to other people who from the caregiver perspective we can sit there and go, "Well, is your spouse doing this? Mine's doing this. How are you handling that?" It's been very helpful.

The individual counseling helped him process a lot of the things that he witnessed and had to do in Iraq. The group counseling lets him safely reminisce within the security of others who have been there. The difference between Mark from before to today is a 180. Is that 180 where he would have been had he not been in Iraq? No. I think our lives would have been very different, but this is our new normal, and every day is an adventure. That's how I look at it. I don't look at it as, oh my god this isn't what our life is supposed to be. He now wants to get out of the house. He now wants to go do things and be part of groups. Granted, it's still you know, if the group gets too big or if the crowd is too big, we're still having to leave, but not necessarily as quickly as we would've.

Now, it gets better. You just have to change your perspective. If I kept that original distraught in the beginning and carried it forward to today I'd be a miserable person, but to be able to look at everyday as a new day, a new adventure, and to take the positive out of it, that's what I would offer, look for what you can gain from it, not what you've lost.



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