

Recognizing depression and starting recovery

Jeff: My name is Jeff. I was a U.S. Marine Reservist from '97 to 2005. I served in Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. I was at Breach Point West. It was the day that the war started. We were told to get into the bunkers and then all of a sudden, we heard this roaring sound and we looked up and there was an ICBM flying directly overhead and that point, that is seared to my memory because I remember saying to myself, "This shit is real."

It was after my enlistment was over that there became problems and I felt relieved at one point because I thought, "Okay, now I can focus fully on my life and I can move forward and I can pursue my career, but there was also a sense of loss." You just feel like you experienced something that no one else is gonna ever experience and the only people who are really gonna know are the people who were there.

People around me started noticing my symptoms of depression. They were like, "You're never happy. You're never joyful. Your anger is starting to be uncontrollable." I got a teaching job in another town where I had to work during the week away from my family and then only come back and see them on the weekends and I thought it was just the stress of the job that was changing my personality. I think it was about five months into the job, it got to be too much for my wife, too much for my family and they said, "You, you need to seek help." I finally started working with a Psychologist and he said, "Yes, you're extremely depressed. You never thought this was a problem?" And I said, "I thought it was temporary. I thought it was brought on by stress, brought on by my job." We started talking about it and we started talking about my past and how I felt about myself and how being in the military changed me. I put so much pressure on myself. I became an island.

We got to a point in our therapy where he thought it would be a good idea for me to go on an antidepressant and so I went to the Psychiatrist and he evaluated me. He agreed. I felt my mood improve. I felt that I could focus on my life instead of my mood and my anger diminished. My sadness diminished. I hadn't signed up with the VA yet. I was talking to some military friends and they said, "You need to go to the VA. You need to get help at the VA." It just happened coincidentally that my insurance ran out and I was going to the VA at the same time. I kind of transitioned over and I started moving all of my mental health stuff, my issues, my discussions, my prescriptions, everything to the VA. If you've never been through it and you're sitting there on the borderline going, "I don't know if I can do this because I'm so ashamed." There is no shame. Once you go through it, you'll realize, it's necessary and people are there to support you. The shame you feel is not real shame. It's fear of the unknown and there is nothing more scary than sitting there feeling like you're losing control and it's okay. It's okay to feel that way and it's okay to go and get help. You're not wasting anything. You're not wasting anyone's time. You're not wasting anyone's money. You're not putting a burden on anyone else. It's never as bad as you think it's going to be. It's always going to feel better afterward.



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