

A fellow Veteran urged Aaron to seek support

Aaron: Hi, my name is Aaron. I was stationed in Hunter Army Airfield in Georgia. I did my tour in OEF in Afghanistan. I served in the U.S. Army. I was a medic for the 1st Ranger Battalion. My job as a medic overseas, basically, I was in an outstation. I was the main provider. If not, I had a peer with me. We would be pretty much taking care of the health and wellness of our whole camp.

It was a lot of responsibility, I felt. But I felt like I was properly trained and well-equipped to go there. But I was not emotionally prepared for what I was getting into. I wasn't thinking of exactly all the scenarios that could happen. Especially if its like your friend or someone you knew.

One of our team leaders, actually, he got wounded. He got shot. He was just laying on the ground. So, nobody knew exactly what was the cause. But luckily, I was right behind him. I ended up having to run through machinegun fire to pick him up and drag him behind cover. That particular night I believe it did stick with me until this day.

Being really naïve, a young ranger, getting this training you think that you can save everyone.

I had a really hard time adjusting back to the civilian life. Originally, I was going to go to school full-time, use the GI bill and go from there. But actually, I was not ready to go to school at the time. My mind was not in the right place. I could not concentrate. Just all the symptoms of PTSD such as being hypervigilant, scanning the classrooms, constantly looking for exits.

At the time, I was overweight. I was about 190 pounds, so I was pretty chubby. My motivation was at an all-time low. I just didn't care much about anything at the time. I was really socially withdrawn. My friends noticed right away that I would get irritated really easily, frustrated really easily. I would just have outbursts of anger.

I was told by another Veteran that I knew in the Bay Area, he told me about his experiences in San Francisco VA. Eventually, I took his advice and went to that hospital. I went through cognitive behavior therapy. It was a once a week meeting with my social worker that was there to help me. Basically, it was just changing the way I thought of certain things by just training my mind, basically.

I wanted to kind of take a break, get a new scenery, so I went up to Concord Vet Center. They were really kind. Anything, pretty much, I needed help with they were there to help me. I had individual counseling. My counselor did offer me group therapy, but I felt like at the time I was not ready for it.

One of the guys that was working there was a prior Marine. He actually went there to seek help. He told me his personal story of how he got better. He met a group of Veterans like him and it helped him adjust into the civilian life a lot better. I took his advice and did the same thing as him. I met a group of Veterans that were going through the same thing as me. It helped having people that could cope with you and that could understand your experiences.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**

The first thing I learned is patience. I think a lot more patient with how I feel at the moment. I like to hang out with my friends a lot more often than prior. I like to attend to more social outings. I feel like I'm a lot more outgoing, just like how I was prior to me coming home. Having an open mind, just accepting a lot more and just not being closeminded that this is the end-all, be-all. Seeking help. Not thinking that you're too strong to do it yourself.

Some of the advice I would give to Veterans getting ready to transition back home would be 1.) to attend the tech classes. Really attend it and write the notes. You should really attend those classes and see what they have to offer you. Two is never to think you are alone. There are always different resources. There are always people willing to hear you out, to help you out. Three would be never to give up. Just like anything you guys did in the past, just don't give up. Keep going at it. Eventually, everything will get better.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

MAKE THE
CONNECTION