

# It's Okay to Hurt

## ACCEPTING POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

On July 11, 2018, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs published a story entitled "[When the Walls Come Down](#)." It was an interview with a public affairs officer named Amber and her struggle, first, to recognize that she was suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and then to learn how to deal with it.

## How many of these symptoms do you deal with daily?

(Check all that apply)

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- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol or Drug Problems    | <input type="checkbox"/> Anger and Irritability       | <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic Pain             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Confusion                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty Concentrating     | <input type="checkbox"/> Dizziness                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eating Problems             | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling on Edge              | <input type="checkbox"/> Feelings of Hopelessness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flashbacks                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Gambling                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Guilt                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headaches                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of Interest or Pleasure | <input type="checkbox"/> Nightmares               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Noise or Light Irritation   | <input type="checkbox"/> Reckless Behavior            | <input type="checkbox"/> Relationship Problems    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social Withdrawal/Isolation | <input type="checkbox"/> Stress and Anxiety           | <input type="checkbox"/> Trouble Sleeping         |

There are many symptoms associated with PTSD. For many, flashbacks and drug or alcohol problems control their lives. For others, life seems to end as they sink deeper and deeper into withdrawal and depression. If you are experiencing any combination of the above symptoms, you should visit your local VA healthcare center, where they offer many programs to get you back on track.

Death, sadly, is part of war. Soldiers, police officers, EMTs, and firefighters all see far more death than the average person. When you are regularly exposed to that type of trauma, you become desensitized and build walls around your heart to stop what you see from causing you pain.

Many first responders and soldiers use alcohol and/or pain medication as a "salve" for their inner wounds. When that band-aid stops working, panic attacks set in. The panic sends you spiraling into depression, and the depression dumps you into the abyss of withdrawal from everyone around you.

This is the "common" path of PTSD. But then there are the additional symptoms you checked off up above. Many people complain they are now forgetful -- where are those keys? Where did I park the car? Oh, did I have an appointment today? Anger flares up when there is no reason for it. You can't concentrate even to read a book or watch a movie.

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*"As a soldier, you constantly have this need to want to be tough," Amber says. "You have the desire to want to be an example, a leader. You know, soldiers can't break down . . . So, I had to learn that it was okay to fall apart, and I had to learn that it was okay to break, and I had to learn that it was okay to be broken."*

*-- Amber*

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The “rockets’ red glare” has an entirely different meaning to one suffering from PTSD. While children are waving flags and wide-eyed watching fireworks, a soldier may be hiding in a dark place trying not to hear the sounds exploding in his or her head. Flashbacks force panic attacks and sometimes violence as they relive some event from their past.

Amber finally turned to her local VA healthcare system for help, but she hadn’t made it into her appointment before she broke down in the waiting room. Here is where she learned the importance of fellow soldiers -- she calls them her “tribe.” First, the soldier next to her took her hand. Before long, others in the waiting room had come over to hold her up as well.

The most important treatment for PTSD is a support group of those who have been where you are. They will lead you when you need it and walk beside you when that’s all you require.

The second most important step is individual counseling to help you form a plan of action. Counselors will help you learn what outside influences trigger your personal responses (the ones you checked above) and then build a plan how to avoid panic attacks when you face those situations.

Additional treatments for PTSD may include writing in a journal, creating collages or some other type of art therapy, equestrian therapy, or group therapy. Your local VA offers some of these treatment plans. If you are struggling with stress and panic attacks, get help today!