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What Veterans Want You To Know About PTSD

There are a few things we should all understand about the common disorder.

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For many, this Veterans Day comes with a little extra heaviness. Just days ago, our country elected a new president who has [insulted decorated war](#)

[veterans](#) and suggested that post-traumatic stress disorder is a [sign of weakness](#).

Unfortunately, PTSD myths and stereotypes like this are all too common. An estimated [8 million Americans](#) — and up to [31 percent of Vietnam War veterans](#) and [20 percent of Iraq veterans](#) — suffer from PTSD, and rates of the disorder in the U.S. are now [higher than ever](#).

But still, the disorder is poorly understood, stigmatized and often misrepresented, and the negative connotations surrounding PTSD are a major part of what keeps many veterans from seeking help. Increasing understanding around the disorder can only help more veterans to seek help and get better treatment.

In honor of Veterans Day, here are five things vets wish others knew about PTSD.

Most people have no idea what veterans have been through.

Anyone who refers to veterans with PTSD as “weak” has no idea what those people have seen and experienced in a war zone, or the toll that these experiences can take on an individual — no matter how “strong” they are.

“War, I believe, dare not be commented on by those who has yet to experience it,” [one military veteran told Gawker](#). “Until you kill other human beings for survival, what could you possibly say about it? It assaults all your senses, the smell of death and the machines that cause it. Noises so loud you feel like an ant under a lawnmower. It is incomprehensible.”

“On my best days I tell myself I killed to survive,” he added. “On my worst my mind tells me I committed acts of madness so that I didn’t go mad.”

The blog PTSD: A Soldier’s Perspective aims to share stories from and inspiration for veterans struggling with after-effects of their service.

“There is disconnection between everything human and what has to be done in combat,” a vet named Scott Lee [wrote on the platform](#) in 2008. “Imagine being in an unimaginable situation and having to do the unthinkable.”

That being said, [some veterans say](#) there’s a common misperception that counselors or therapists can’t do anything because they can’t possibly understand. Psychologists can help even if they don’t understand everything about war, according to Jeffrey Denning, the author of [Warrior SOS: Military Veterans’ Stories of Faith, Emotional Survival and Living with PTSD](#).

PTSD isn’t always easy to recognize.

Symptoms of the disorder often go masked and unnoticed. War journalist Sebastian Junger, who spent months embedded with American troops in Afghanistan, wrote [a Vanity Fair essay](#) about the experience last June. In it, he highlighted his own struggle to recognize PTSD.

“I had no idea that what I’d just experienced had anything to do with combat; I just thought I was going crazy,” he wrote. “For the next several months I kept having panic attacks whenever I was in a small place with too many people — airplanes, ski gondolas, crowded bars. Gradually the incidents stopped, and I didn’t think about them again until I found myself talking to a woman at a picnic who worked as a psychotherapist. She asked whether I’d been affected by my war experiences, and I said no, I didn’t think so. But for some reason I described my puzzling panic attack in the subway. ‘That’s called post-traumatic stress disorder,’ she said.”

Much of the suffering of PTSD is silent.

PTSD survivors often suffer in silence, trying to present a strong face to the world and not seeking help for fear of being seen as weak. [A veteran who served in Baghdad in 2007 and 2008](#) opened up about the struggle to admit to himself that he needed care.

“The few nights a week I’d get drunk and start crying inconsolably, although often silently, I tried to shake off as simple moments of weakness,” [he wrote, according to Gawker](#). “I should be tough, like my grandfather returning from WW2, or all the others who seemed to get on day after day without noticeable problems.”

“Some of the toughest guys I had ended up the worst off” he added. “I simply hope that everyone, at some point, can get the help they need and I hope the VA can get its act together to assist those who so desperately need it.”

PTSD doesn't make you violent.

A harmful stereotype about PTSD is that it leads to aggressive behavior. But research indicates that the prevalence of violence among individuals with PTSD is only [slightly higher than the general population](#), according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

In a [viral blog post](#) published on the website RhinoDen, a veteran named Rob fights back against the dangerous stereotype that veterans with PTSD have violent tendencies.

“I have never committed violence in the workplace, just like the vast majority of those who suffer with me,” he writes. “I have never physically assaulted anyone out of anger or rage. It pains me when I listen to the news and every time a veteran commits a crime (or commits suicide); it is automatically linked to and blamed on PTSD. Yes, there are some who cannot control their actions due to this imbalance in our heads, but don’t put a label on us that we are all incorrigible. Very few of us are bad.”

Recovery is possible.

One of the most damaging stereotypes about PTSD is the idea that people with the disorder are somehow broken or can’t heal.

Roy Webb, a Marine who served in Vietnam and suffered from PTSD and insomnia for four decades, told CBS News about his [recovery through yoga and meditation](#).

“I did feel at total peace, like I hadn’t known in years. You don’t have all those thoughts flying through your mind at night,” he said.

Iraq veteran Gordon Ewell, who has overcome PTSD, sent a message of hope to his fellow veterans: Recovery is always possible, and you’re never alone.

“You may not be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel yet, but I promise it is there,” he said in an interview published in Denning’s book. “I promise you can get through anything. I also promise that there are people willing to walk with you every step of the way.”