

Sgt Dave's Story on his experience with post-deployment stress

I am in no way a hard man but do prefer to internalise issues and deal with them and try not to bother anyone or look foolish if it becomes a non-issue.

When, I once had a serious medical issue involving my sight I thought ' nah, I'll be right' until my wife told me what the symptoms were and unless I want to go blind to get to the MO right there and then. So no surprise when I came back from an intense deployment *with some kinetic pressures*, I did the same.

I took to the hills 3 days after returning home hunting and walking, leaving my confused wife at home. I scared her with verbal outbursts about the small things. I made unachievable lists of things to complete around the house in a weekend. I pushed away my civvi mates because they didn't get it and escaped the day to day with random trips around the country..... I watched hours of combat footage on youtube.

Only after hindsight and reflection can I see that what I was trying to do was put myself back in situations where I was functioning again in the 'combat' environment. Putting out personal challenges and achievements to try for those same endorphins I had on deployment, gaining the same freedom and simplicity that a deployment can offer that normal life restricts or makes safe. I had an itch that I couldn't stop scratching, I wanted to be back with my team where everyday felt like it meant something, not stuck far removed from what I thought was reality.

What I failed to realise was that this normal home life was reality too. Looking back now I can see that my outbursts and erratic behaviour were not normal, and these caused heartache and depression for my wife as I worked through dealing with it by myself. It was only when coming to a pinnacle of emotion did it dawn that there was an issue. Unfortunately this came too late and took 4-5 years, by which my relationship has suffered significantly. It was only made easier by seeing a NZDF Padre that we (my wife and I) could both register each other's emotions and for me to see that I was just being a D!ck.

Part of the reason I took so long to get help was that I didn't want to be branded or 'Labelled' and or waste peoples time on what I thought was a private matter. Knowing what I know now I would realise earlier that my experiences on deployment had had an impact and my reactions were not uncommon given these experiences. I learned that sometimes I can't go it alone, that trying to do so has an impact on me and those around me, and that getting help (in my case from the padre) can help find a way through.

Personally I wish I'd learned this earlier. I thought I was tough enough to nut it out; it took me a while to realise I wasn't, and then to get myself sorted again. I know there are others out there who are not going ok, not knowing what's happening or believing that there's nothing they can do to sort it. . It's hard to ask for help, we do want to try and go it alone, but sometimes we need to get help. Its not a 'poor me' approach. We owe it to ourselves and those around us.