



## Iraq Vets getting counseling upon return home

The Iraq war has left our soldiers who returned home with a little more than wounds sustained from bullets and hand grenades. They come home with something called PTSD, Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. The symptoms aren't visible like a wound, or a lost leg or an arm. The symptoms are sometimes delayed for months after returning home. It seems to affect the majority of veterans returning home. Over 200,000 vets have returned home and about 12,500 of them are being treated for PTSD. The concept of what was happening to our veterans was only acknowledged after the Vietnam War. It took longer because of stigma men feel for seeking help. It's a stigma, that had been perpetuated in the Armed Forces. This led to few men disclosing their problems, so perhaps 12,500 is not representative of all the number of vets who came home, withdrew, and never sought help.

Another program that has offered [counseling employment](#), the military has put in place [counselors](#) working with soldiers' families to prepare them before they got back home and returned to civilian life. Studies have recognized there is a period of readjustment for our men and families are trained how to respond to them during that period. It is important families acknowledge that adjustment period and respect the process a returning soldier will have to endure.

The VA currently leads the way for treating PTSD, but it is an uphill battle. The VA has 50 [counselor jobs](#) to care for vets from past wars. 50 [counseling positions](#) filled might sound lots, of professional help, but the VA has 206 centers all across the US. Fifty counselors cannot spread over 200 locations. The VA understands their challenge and they are allocating as many resources to the problem as possible.

What causes PTSD to occur? In war, everyday life requires you to be constantly aware of the enemy and their attacks. If the men are not being attacked then they might be attacking, killing in their path women and children who were not supposed to be there when the bombing happened. But, they were there, and the men saw the dead bodies as they moved through the wreckage of what we call war. This is horror and it causes PTSD. It is only one example of the horrors our soldiers face. Here are some of the stories shared by veterans:

A soldier called to say he saw an Apache Helicopter striking a house where they had seen enemy ammunition being dropped. When the attack ended, he said there was silence. The gunshots had stopped. Then out of the rubble, he started to hear children crying and screaming. It's a horrible sound, the worst you will ever hear in your life.

Huze, a corporal in the marines, said he would never relax. Without rest, your senses start to numb and you become emotionally stoic. He says, "The unrelenting insurgent threat in Iraq gives no opportunity to relax and combat numbs the senses and emotions. There is no 'front'. You go back to the

Army base and go get your dinner and the dinner hall blows up!" Day after day, these things affect soldiers and cause PTSD.

Huze also described seeing dead children lying along the road. One was only three or four years old and he says he remembers not caring and not thinking much more of it than a dead dog in the street. Huze said when he got home and was hugging his little girl, he remembered the small dead child, and he remembered not caring; that hurt. The experience in Iraq causes the hurt and leads to PTSD.

A veteran from the Kuwait war said he attributes his PTSD from the demand to always be on guard and make life or death decisions in an instance. This is extreme fear and anxiety. These also cause PTSD.

### What are the symptoms of PTSD?

The stories from the veterans days in war tell that days filled with horror are sometimes re-experienced. It may be a memory flashback that seems uncontrollable and the veteran can't will it from happening. The memories can become haunting through intrusive memories, nightmares, and hallucinations. The memories are usually triggered by something that symbolizes the traumatic event.

Other types of symptoms reported were:

- Troubled sleep
- Irritability
- Anger
- Poor concentration, hyper-vigilance
- Exaggerated responses

They often feel they have little in common with civilian peers. Issues that concern friends and family can seem trivial after combat.



## Counseling Career Feature

Families have noticed that the every day routines like sleeping and driving and hearing loud noises can be issues for a man suffering from PTSD. Remember the very best thing a family can do is respect the veteran's experiences, and if someone offers an ear to listen, then get ready and be prepared to hear things you won't like. Respect his experiences. Your husband, son, or brother might feel depression, detachment or estrangement, guilt, intense anxiety and panic, and other negative emotions. They don't relate to others who haven't shared their experiences. Problems of the family may seem trivial to a man who has recently returned home from the army.

Veterans don't often want to talk about what's bothering them and the research done on the disorder has prompted the VA to setup their [counselors](#) to be available on a walk in basis as well as to hold group sessions for the Vets to meet and talk. Part of post- traumatic stress syndrome is becoming withdrawn and feeling that you have nothing in common with the outside world. That is why vet center counselors first offer the veterans to come by and talk. From that point onward, they may be asked to come regularly or come back and share their experiences so that they can help others adjust. Counselors say, if they can get the veteran to walk through the door the first time, they can usually keep him visiting.

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