

Jacob and Hero



Dedicated
to
Soldiers
and
Veterans
who are
thinking
about
Suicide

**15 Actions You can Take Today to Heal
from Trauma and Wanting to Die**

Disclaimer: This book is not meant to replace medical advice or treatment by a professional in all cases of both physical and/or mental illness. Suicidal Ideation can be an emergent condition and require direct intervention by legal or medical authorities. This book is meant to provide an overview of suicidal behaviors and is the author's own experiences and practices which may or may not agree with current medical practices.

If you or someone you know is experiencing active thoughts of suicide and you are concerned for your or their immediate safety, call 911.

Veterans Suicide Hotline Number: 800-273-8255 press 1

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He is feeling trapped by the four walls like they are closing in on him even though he knows they can't move. There is only a small sliver of fading light that is getting in, the floor is covered in shit, and the air is so hot and

the foul that breathing feels a lot like just holding his breath.



The more he tries to calm down, the more pressure he feels to break free. He can feel he is losing control of this moment and no amount of pacing or rationalizing is getting him out or

take off. calm. The feelings are just about ready to

He can feel both now - the force that is pushing him into something he's not sure he really wants to do and the calming of another part of his mind as he makes the decision to let go to what is driving these thoughts and feelings in every part of his body and mind.

He can't hold back any longer and he's tired of trying. Just do it. It will all be over then one way or another. Just do it...

With one last effort he steels himself as he slams against the railing that looks like the only hope for an opening. It doesn't give and he can feel his left leg crack under the force of his movement. One more time he tells himself, willing himself past the pain and the frustration and the fear. One more time.

He takes a deep breath, tries to focus on this last shot, just go - he wills his mind to control his body, just do it. He rushes the small opening and the moment he feels the impact on his chest he knows the moment is lost. He collapses on the floor knowing that was it, his last shot taken and it failed.

There's nothing left to give and there is nothing left to do. He lies down and waits, no longer thinking or caring or wanting. He waits knowing that he's ready to die. As he closes his eyes the last of the filtered light dims from what was his last hope.



Memories of green pastures, running through tall grass, and the coolness of a pond on a hot summer day play like a slow motion movie in his mind.

I was happy once he remembers. Somehow it had all changed and freedom became prison.

Darkness is all he can see now. There's nothing left to do and with that last thought a sense of relief washes over him in a wave.

I tried and I'm done, I can let go now....and with one last breath he feels his life leave his body and back out into a world he seemed to have lost so long ago...

These words are being written primarily for soldiers and veterans and the people who love them. They are being written about ***the epidemic of soldiers and veterans taking their own lives*** - either by overt acts of suicide or less obvious forms such as substance abuse, car accidents, and other acts of self-destructive behavior.

The message however is not one meant only for soldiers and veterans. ***The truth is most people are committing some form of suicide***, it is just in a much slower form. Lifestyle choices that destroy health, reckless behavior, relationships filled with resentment, careers either gone or unbearable - how many people can really say that they are healthy and happy 95% of the time? Because that is what we are meant to be - not as it has been written, "living lives of quiet desperation."

The crisis we face with veterans and soldiers committing suicide is only one more manifestation of an underlying issue that is facing all of humanity. ***Our world no longer values life itself***. Death has become its own solution either by death to another so that we can get what we want or death to our self so we can then end our own pain and suffering.

Veterans and soldiers are finding themselves faced with feelings of betrayal, anger, guilt, shame, helplessness, despair, and loss which then gives way to a hopelessness with so many finding themselves lost in a system that neither protects or can fix what got broken along the way.

People make the decision to commit suicide when the level of pain is too great to take for one more minute. The answer to stopping suicide lies not in medicating, denying, or demanding the pain go away - but rather to face it, own it, and then find a way to let it go. Whatever the pain is for each of us must be traced back to its source - only then can true healing take place.

The solution to the crisis of suicide is not complicated or expensive - but it is also not easy or quickly found. ***It will however require all of us to take responsibility for our part - whether we are soldiers, veterans, people who love them, people who want to help them, or people who live in the country who sent them to war in the first place***.

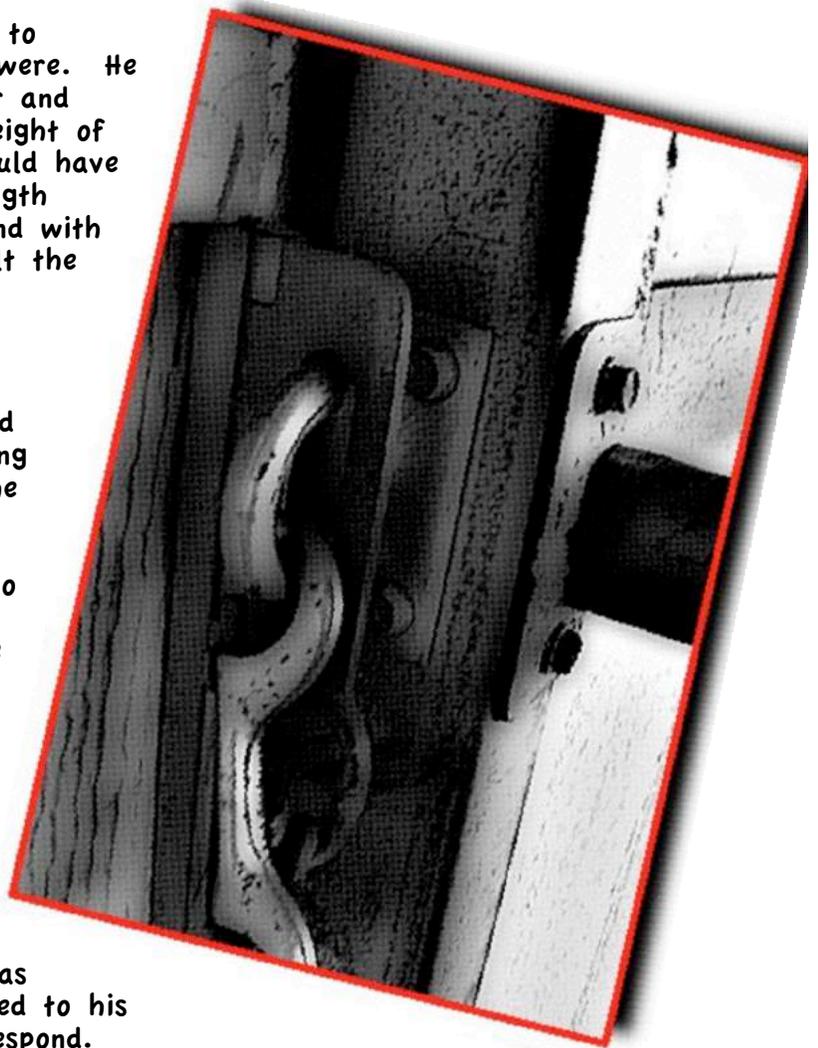
Jacob walked up to the stall door that was chained and locked. Who did that he asked himself? In a panic he threw his duffle bag to the ground and looked for the bolt cutters he knew he'd put close by before he had left last year. They've got to be here and Hero has to be okay.

Where, where he kept saying to himself out loud...there, there they were. He grabbed them, ran to the stall door and with everything he had used the weight of his shoulder to push with what should have been his right hand. Give me strength was his prayer, give me strength and with what felt like his last effort he felt the steel give way.

He threw the cutters to the ground and with his left hand pulled the stall door open. Hero was laying on the ground, not moving - "NO" he screamed as he flung himself down looking for any sign of life, tears coming so hard and fast he could no longer see. "Hero, don't leave me," were the words he choked on as he felt for a pulse, a breath, anything...

Hero felt himself suddenly getting pulled back into his body and a breath filling his lungs that he couldn't stop - it was life, life was breathing itself back into him...what is happening was his only thought as the pain returned to his awareness and his body began to respond.

But something was different, something familiar had returned and in a moment a memory became the present, it was Jacob. Jacob was back and now, so was he.



Why do we choose life? Why do we choose to let our life go? Why do we choose to help another to live? Why do we choose to walk away and let another die? Why do we choose to take another's life?

What makes us want to live more than we want to die?

Rarely does a person ask themselves these questions because they are bored one day. It is most often when we are facing death in whatever form it may come - suicide, illness, an accident, an overdose, or age - that we ask ourselves about life.

The idea of dying can feel like a solution to a problem that can't be fixed. Death can feel like the only way out when we feel like Hero did - trapped in a small room with no way to escape. We have given every effort and nothing has worked. Now, we feel broken, defeated, and hopeless - and letting go is the only real option we believe we have left.

The truth is everyone and everything on this planet will die, including the planet itself eventually. Death is not something that can be prevented or avoided. It is one thing we all have in common with everyone and everything. We all die.

The question of suicide is not about whether you will die or not, only when and how you will die. Death has become a word to be feared and a topic to be avoided. If we think or talk about it we might somehow make it happen.

But when thoughts of death and committing suicide begin to take hold in your mind - death is something then that needs to be thought about, and for some, talked about.

Death can feel like the only option, solution, or answer you have to stopping whatever is causing you so much pain. But the question I want to ask you is this:

Do you want to die or do you want the source of the pain to stop?

In my own life I spent almost every day in my memory until just a few years ago wanting to die. I thought about it, planned it out, wrote letters to my family, made arrangements for my animals and belongings, and just about everything else one might do who is ready to commit suicide.

But I never actually did it. Something inside of me just wouldn't quit. If I had known it would take me over 40 years to ever feel any sense of joy,

hope, or peace - I don't know if I would have been able to hold on that long. But for many reasons I did.

I have spent many hours both personally and professionally talking to people who wanted to die. And almost without exception when I asked them the same question listed above in one form or another, the answer was always the same.

No one really wanted to die, they just didn't know how to fix the problem or stop the source of their pain.

Am I now going to promise you I can tell you how? No.

But, I can tell you this. Once you get your mind trapped like Hero was in that stall - it becomes impossible to find a way out. There is always one last attempt, but if it fails - hope also feels gone and letting go feels like the only choice left.

In my own life I can still remember that moment when the lifeline that had been dangling in front of me for who knows how long finally made its way into my hands. It was the moment when I got why my life was my own to decide if I wanted to live or die and it was also the moment when I knew I wanted to live.

Like the song "Amazing Grace," in a lifetime of being blind, suddenly I could see.

I believe there are really two steps to finding a way out of the hopelessness that has consumed a mind ready to die. **The first is letting the mind and body heal from whatever got you to the point you are at right now. The second is then to find meaning in your past so that you can find purpose for your future.**

The first step is really healing the mind and the body. The second step is a journey into the spiritual. That may not be a place you want to go or even believe exists. And, you can stop at the first step and live a happy and healthy life.

But trauma and facing death are often part of the path on which the soul must travel to find their true purpose and meaning in this world and for their life. **Trauma is the bridge that connects you from who you were to who you are becoming. It is not the final destination.** We are not meant to be chained to anything in our past - no matter what was done to us nor what we may have done to someone else. Life is bigger than any single act or experience. But it is time that brings us to this realization and so it is in time we must allow the body and mind to first heal.

Much of our current cultural beliefs are that our God, government, or the world somehow "owes" us a happy and healthy life with no trauma, loss, or pain. We've been conditioned to believe money, fame, power, people, or glory is what will make us happy and that somehow we are to get it all easily and without effort.

The perfect body, the perfect relationship, the perfect family, the perfect job, the perfect income, will all make us perfectly happy....only on TV does "perfect" really live. Perfect is the grand illusion our culture has told us we can achieve. Bad things aren't supposed to happen and when they do, we as the victim need to be rewarded.

When nothing feels perfect and pain is all we know, suicide then can become the perfect solution to an impossible dream - the attainment of a life in which no one feels any pain, loss, or suffering.

Jacob felt his heart almost fly out of his chest. Hero was alive. After everything this horse had been through and he had been through to get back to him, to lose him would have been something he wasn't sure he could have come back from.

Jacob had witnessed too much loss and death already. He was tired of killing others. He was tired of seeing people he loved killed. He was tired of thinking about killing himself. He was tired of everything about death. He had held onto Hero in his heart and mind every moment during his deployment, when the IED had exploded under him, and the long and painful moments that followed through the rehab he had just got discharged from. They had tried to convince him life without his right arm would be okay, but it was the damage inside him he knew was the real threat.

This horse had been through hell when he had found him. He had nursed him back to health. Then, just when they were both finding their way around the ranch he was working at, he had felt compelled to enlist. His brother died in Afghanistan and now he had told himself he needed to do this to avenge his brother's death.

Coming home he found a foreclosure sign on the ranch, no one in sight, and now - here was Hero almost dead from neglect. The war never really ends, does it he told himself. "Today, nobody dies. Today we live and tomorrow we won't worry about, will we Hero," Jacob said out loud, hoping this would make it real.

Jacob got up to go find water. Hero watched him walk away and for a brief moment thought maybe it was better Jacob didn't come back. But then he caught himself. Something was different about Jacob, he moved in a different way - his balance seemed to be off. There was also a sadness, somehow Jacob felt broken in the same way Hero had felt broken when Jacob found him the first time.

No, he would wait for Jacob to come back and this time, the road they traveled together would be to Jacob what the road had been to him. Everything broken can heal given the right circumstances and Jacob would give to him what he would give to Jacob. The door was now open for them both. Maybe he couldn't yet walk, but he knew somehow he would again.



Green pastures, tall grass, cool ponds - that was his goal for them both.

Jacob found an old bucket and was able to use the hand crank to get water out of the well. He went back to find Hero looking up at him. There was that gleam he had seen the first time he had found him. That will to live. "That is what I need from you my friend, that desire

for life no matter what we have to face."

Jacob set the bucket down and Hero had his first taste of water in days. Life never tasted so good....corny, but true.

Life without hope is hell. Life with hope holds all the promise in this Universe. I can't tell you what your promise is, but it is mine to offer you a tiny ray of hope.

There is no moment more precious or meaningful than the moment the light of hope finds its way into the mind of one ready to die without it.

I found my way out with a tiny ray of hope. I want to offer that same thing to you. And, if we are both lucky enough, ***someday you will offer that tiny ray of hope to someone else who can't find it.*** It may be a fellow soldier. It may be a neglected dog or horse. It may be your own child.

Someday we are all going to die. ***Today you can decide if you want to live.*** How you choose to live is up to you as much as how you choose to die.

And choosing to save your own life is as heroic as being willing to die to save someone else's. I know you have the courage to die for someone you love. ***My hope is you will find the courage to live because you love your Self.*** No matter what you have done. No matter what has been done to you. No matter how hopeless it feels. There is always a way, you just can't see it right now.

Hero doesn't have to know how to help Jacob and Jacob doesn't have to know how to help Hero in this moment. All they have to know is that they can. The rest will follow.

You don't have to know how to make your pain stop. You just have to decide that today you won't try and stop it by committing suicide. That is all. The rest will come. ***It is the promise.***

Part Two:

15 Actions You Can Take Today to Heal from Trauma and Wanting to Die

I want to first say thank you for reading this. I have created this eBook so that it is free, accessible, and anonymous for anyone who wants to help either themselves or someone they know that is suffering and wanting to die. Suicide is scary for everyone involved and it can feel easier to ignore it than to dive right in.

Suicide is like a terminal illness of the mind and spirit - but with a much greater hope for a positive outcome. It does not need to be terminal and it can be cured.

I would recommend your printing out at the very least Part Two of this eBook. I have tried to be as brief and concise as possible - though this book is a lot longer than I had hoped for! But each tiny paragraph is often the summary of entire books - it is a lot of information in one place and it will be easy to miss the value of a paragraph by not having it printed in front of you and able to reread again.

Now is a time of crisis and long explanations filled with facts explaining why things work isn't really helpful in this moment. Most of what you read here is not my original ideas, but rather the results of many people doing lots of research over what will appear too simple and obvious. Internet searches on the terms you want to follow up on will get you to the books, studies, and experts who have done the research on them.

But most of it will sound like just common sense. We were never designed as a species to live in artificial environments and with or without war, we are all living with the effects of lifestyles that are not suited to our bodies or brains. Everyone will benefit - the suicidal and the healthy and happy person by what you will read here.

What follows is a list of steps you can take to begin to bring balance and healing back to your brain and body. They may not seem like much or feel helpful if you do them once, but combined and done consistently you will slowly bring balance and healing back to your body and brain. The reason this is important is that much of the feelings about wanting to die come from an imbalance created by the stresses and trauma's you have experienced which have thrown the chemistry of your body out of whack.

As a society we want a pill and a quick fix. Pills may make some symptoms go away, but that is only masking an effect without addressing what is the cause. Feeling discomfort in any form - be it a physical symptom or a feeling - has become something to be feared in our world. We avoid feeling discomfort at all costs - through drugs, alcohol, entertainment, sex, work, exercise, sleep, medication, and an endless list of other things.

Suicidal feelings are very uncomfortable. They are uncomfortable for you if you are having them, for the people who are near you, and for the people trying to help you. Death then becomes the only solution to ending the discomfort. Death can feel like the only way out of whatever situation you are in that is so uncomfortable you can't take it any more. Death can feel like an answer to a problem once and for all.

One of the first things everyone tries to do is talk the suicidal person out of wanting to commit suicide. That never worked for me or for anyone else I talked to. But here's the thing - wanting to commit suicide is only a thought tied to a feeling. It is not an action. We all want a lot of different things, it's not the wanting that is the issue.

The real issue isn't that you want to die. Underneath that there is something else. And, the first step may or may not be talking about what is underneath. It's not going anywhere so there is no hurry in most cases to get there. If you are reading this and in this moment you want to die - that's fine. Wanting to die is not the problem - trying to run away, fight the feeling, or stop the discomfort by taking an action to die is where all the trouble comes.

For every soldier and veteran reading this just think about what you have already been through. You have lived through a LOT of discomfort already. You know how to do that. Heat, cold, heavy packs to be carried long miles, crummy food, lonely days and nights, endless boredom, terrifying moments, bugs, mud... I could go on, but you already know most of these things.

But no matter how awful any of those moments were - not one of them lasted forever. Every discomfort you had to experience, even for long periods of time, had an end to it. Suicidal feelings are the same as is the pain that is the source of causing them.

The secret is to not fight against the discomfort, but instead find a way to let it pass. Panic attacks happen when we are fighting against what fear is happening in the moment, not what is actually happening in the moment. Suicide is the same. It is giving into the discomfort of the

moment - even if the moment feels like it has been with you for a very long time and you can't yet see a way out.

The only goal in any given moment for the mind wanting to die is to choose to not die. That is it. You don't have to do anything else. With the exception of a severe chemical imbalance in the body or brain or being under the influence of drugs/alcohol, the intensity of the feeling to die will get less. You can't feel any one thing intensely forever - be it a good or bad feeling. In time it will pass or change if you just choose to do nothing.

Below is a list of things you can do to speed the healing process up and also to change the feelings of wanting to die more quickly. They are the basics our brains and body's need to feel good and balanced. Yes, pills can mimic the effects, but no pill lasts forever - the body builds an intolerance to them. Also, pills have side effects which then seem to need more pills to mask those symptoms....and the downhill cycle begins.

You don't have to do them all, but they do give you a place to start. Also, for people who love you they offer simple steps in which they might be able to help you out. When depression or suicidal feelings are at their worst, even simple steps like feeding yourself become too much.

I also want to add that these same steps are part of healing all mental health issues. Healing is less about figuring out what is going wrong and more about just getting the brain and body back to a healthy and functional state. The deeper issues and questions are better left until you are feeling stronger, more stable, and secure in making it from day to day.

After this list there is also a section specifically for family members. Knowing how to be helpful is hard. And, what is even harder are all the things you can't help with. This book isn't meant to be a complete discussion on how to help those who are wanting to die. But it is a place to start. You don't have to know how to stop your pain, you just have to make the decision that today you will live. That is all you need to do.

One last note - you aren't going to FEEL like doing any of this. One of the ways we really make problems for ourselves is waiting until we FEEL like doing something. So, in the same way you most likely didn't feel like getting up before dawn to run drills in boot camp - this is much the same. But, after some time has passed you will be able to see and feel the difference....you just do it, even if you don't want to.

I want to start with two things you can do if you are really hanging on the edge in any given moment. They won't change anything in the long

run, but they will interrupt the cycle of thoughts that can lead to making a decision about going forward with trying to kill your self. The first is also something that can be used during a panic attack or a PTSD flashback.

Grounding:

1. Grounding means to anchor yourself back from where you mind and thoughts are taking you. When you start to get a stream of thoughts going like you want to die, or things are hopeless, or you feel yourself just sinking you can use this technique to interrupt the process.

2. A PTSD flashback is similar to runaway thoughts except it may also be images and memories and sensation of a past event. This process brings your attention back to the here and now and interrupts the flow of thoughts that are causing the fear and terror.

3. The idea of grounding is based in the focusing on your five senses. You are shifting your focus from ideas, thoughts, feelings, memories, images, or past experiences to what you can see, touch, smell, and hear.

4. The goal is not to "think" about anything, but to just focus on the body senses.

Touch: You can touch the ground, pet an animal, touch a tree, grab a football, anything that requires you to then acknowledge you are touching something and focus on that. You are shifting away from thinking to basically a non-thinking place.

Sight: Name ten objects you see. Name colors. Name shapes. You are not finding things in your memory, but are actually looking around you to focus your eyes on what you can see and then name them specifically.

Sound: Purposefully listen to the sounds around you. Birds, insects, wind, cars, and anything you can hear. Turn the TV off, take the headphone out of your ears, and listen to sounds around you and then name them like above. You are focusing away from thought and moving your awareness into your body.

Smell: Smell is the most powerful and long term of the five senses we have. This is something it is good to have planned ahead on or to just do for yourself. We associate smells with specific experiences that often trigger an emotional response.

Vanilla or chocolate chip cookies might equal being safe as a child. Fresh cut grass may feel like freedom or youth. The same is true in a negative way and so it can be helpful to think ahead on what any of these sensory experiences can trigger in a negative way. But smell is very powerful and is a good way shift your mood or thoughts when done intentionally.

5. This technique is helpful to practice when you are not in crisis. It is also a game you can play with young children to help teach them how to ground themselves. In the beginning it is hard to remember these things when a panic, PTSD trigger, or wave of depression hits - this is where someone close to you can help. You can show them this technique and then ask them to remind and maybe even guide you through it if you are having a crisis moment.

6. Animals are very grounding, but they are also absorbing your negative energy when you work with them in this process. They need time to recover from your grounding and can do so by walking, playing, swimming, or sleeping - similar to what you need to do now too!

Distraction:

1. The idea of distraction is a two edge sword when you are in a suicidal place. It is a helpful technique to use in specific moments, but can be detrimental as a long-term coping device.

2. Suicidal thoughts can be like a runaway train. The more you think about them, the more you fight them, the more you consider them, the more powerful and logical they can become. Recognizing they are starting to control you instead of you controlling them is a good moment to distract your self. You don't have to decide to live or die, you just have to not think about making that decision right now.

3. When my boyfriend died I listened to a lot of Howard Stern. I can think of no one who has less to say of any importance, which was exactly what I needed - mindless chatter that didn't require me to think at all. Radio, television, movies, books, and the internet can provide a good temporary distraction. However, they are also easy to get lost in.

4. Clean something. This is one of the great depression lifters - just clean something, accomplish a goal, and see an end result. The act of cleaning has many positive benefits and requires very little difficult thinking.

5. Accomplish an easy goal. Baking was my go to distraction. I could do something, accomplish a goal, and then have something I like to eat at the end of it. The rest of my life may have felt out of control, but actually accomplishing a complete task was very helpful - all the extra calories....not so much.

6. There are also negative or harmful distractions. Romantic affairs whether they are sexual or not, addictions of all types, high risk behaviors, and also returning to war or other situations that are highly stressful.

7. A distraction can become destructive when it becomes consuming and you can't pull your self back from it. It is how addiction starts - even if it is a healthy idea such as work, exercise, or helping others.

Sleep:

1. Decide that sleep is an important goal and then work on getting it.

2. Establish a sleep schedule - no erratic hours.

3. Sleep as much as you need while you are in the healing phase. You'll know when you're getting better because you won't want to sleep as much.

4. Make it. The darker it is, the more melatonin that will turn on. This is your brains natural way of calming the body down.

5. When you wake up, get in the sunlight first thing. A minimum 20 minute walk with the rising sun - no sunglasses - allows the sunlight to enter through your eye and turn on your serotonin. Serotonin is your mood stabilizer and feel calm and good hormone.

6. No TV, headphones, cell phones, etc - electromagnetic waves are disruptive to your natural brain waves.

7. If you're still jumpy or have PTSD symptoms - find a way to feel safe when you are sleeping. I never slept well until I got my first dog. I knew he would wake up to warn me first so I could relax enough to stay asleep and not be on alert.

8. Establish rules with family members - right now sleep is a must to heal.

9. If you are jumpy - no gun by the bedside. If you are not safe to others - sleep alone.

10. Own your own good nights sleep - partying, alcohol, caffeine, etc. - you know what you need to do and not do to get some sleep.

There is often the question of when is someone sleeping too much? Depression can manifest in excessive sleeping. Medication can also make someone want to sleep too much.

In my experience, real depression will resolve itself in time. I usually say if the symptoms of a major depression are not getting better: excessive sleeping, no showering or bathing, excessive eating or not eating at all, no participation in life around you, within 2 months (give or take), then the chemistry of the brain has taken over.

However, when there is depression, you will NEVER feel like doing anything constructive. The only way out of depression is to do the things listed here. But this is key: YOU WILL NEVER FEEL LIKE DOING THEM. In the same way no one feels like running 20+ miles with 60 pounds on their back in the heat of the day. You just do it and eventually you will reap the rewards and results...but it takes time.

Oxygen and Breathing:

1. Every cell in your body requires oxygen.
2. Most people only breathe at about 12% of their lung capacity.
3. Low oxygenation symptoms often look like depression.
4. The atmosphere used to be about 30% oxygen, now it is mostly 10-20%. Most of us are not getting enough oxygen into our brain and body.
5. Too much or too little will cause problems.
6. Breathing turns our nervous systems on and off. Breathing quickly and shallowly turns on our sympathetic system - the stress response that allows us to run or fight. Breathing slowly and more deeply turns on our parasympathetic nervous system which calms us down and keeps our body and brain healthy by keeping the stress response off.
7. Most panic attacks and anxiety are triggered by shallow breathing and can be turned off by deep and slow breathing through the nose. Four counts is a good starting point: 4 counts in, hold for 4, and

exhale to 4. This can make you dizzy, so you may need to build up slowly - but it will calm you down if you are anxious or having a panic attack.

8. Everyone will benefit from deep breathing several times a day.

9. Oxygen fires up our metabolism - which when sluggish can feel like depression.

10. It is not necessary to find pure oxygen to breathe - but breathing near trees and plants is good for you and them!

Sunlight:

1. Sunlight is good for you.

2. Sunlight turns on Vitamin D production in your body. Your body will naturally dispose of any excess Vitamin D - you can't over dose.

3. Sunlight enhances your immune system, works with serotonin production, and much more that is not yet understood.

4. The darker your skin, the longer exposure you need to ensure adequate sunlight exposure.

5. If you live in a dark or often overcast environment, consider investing in a light with the equivalent factors from sun exposure.

Food and Nutrition:

1. This can be very complicated and there's not enough room to cover here, but there are a few simple rules to using food to stabilize the brain and body.

2. Real food is better than fake food. The closer it is to the way nature produced it, the better it will be for you.

3. Try and get protein, carbohydrates, and good fats in every meal and snack.

4. Food most greatly affects your blood sugar and insulin. When your blood sugar is unstable - so will be your mood and energy. Sugar/Carbohydrates make your blood sugar rise. Protein keeps it low. Fats are neutral.

5. Energy drinks, soda, excessive coffee, candy, chips, junk food, etc will do nothing to help you heal. The goal is to stabilize your body and brain and these kinds of foods only destabilize them.

6. Cheap vitamins and supplements can do more harm than good. Your money is better spent on getting good food and nutrition.

7. Omega 3 fats are very important for stabilizing your brain.

8. Your brain is almost all cholesterol. Eating quality cholesterol is essential in keeping your brain healthy. For example, grass fed beef/lamb is very good for you as compared to feed lot cows filled with chemicals.

9. Try and eat every few hours some kind of protein/carb/fat combo. This will keep your blood sugar and mood stable.

10. Eat. Stress, being upset, depression, anxiety, etc. often causes people to stop eating. This only creates more long term problems. Even if you don't feel like eating, try and get a few bites down. Family can really help out here - often the person can't get the food prepared, but will eat if it is available. The benefit is you will feel better too. Living with someone who is suicidal is very stressful and high stress requires increased nutrition to cope with it.

Nature:

1. Nature is good for you. Being away from the sights and sounds of a city or urban area is important. The stillness and quiet allow the body to calm down. However, it can feel uncomfortable for a few days before your body and brain adjust to the what is actually an electromagnetic frequency that is very beneficial vs. the frequency rate found in cities and highly chaotic areas filled with frequency waves from electronics.

2. The sounds of nature - birds, insects, etc. actually reset your brain's own brainwave frequencies. You don't have to do anything, just listen to them without reading, listening to an electronic device, or watching an electronic device.

3. You are also getting sunlight, oxygen that is hopefully less polluted, exercise, and much more in nature - combining all of these is a good thing!

Animals:

1. Animals are very therapeutic for people for multiple reasons. However, they are not objects or tools to be used for your benefit at the expense of theirs. They are very sensitive to you and your energy and when any animal is around someone who is depressed, traumatized, suicidal, or mentally chaotic and unstable for long periods of time, it will take its toll on them.

During 9/11, the therapeutic dogs were only allowed to spend 2 hours at a time with traumatized people and they slept the rest of the time to recover. The animal absorbs your energy and all negative emotion is destructive to health - yours and anyone and anything in your proximity. Animals need the same things you do: fresh air, exercise, sleep, quiet, play, and time away from you to recover.

2. For the same reason, animals can be very inspirational to those that love them. Choosing to shift your mood (really, not faking it) to keep the animal you love healthy is a great inspiration.

3. Animals force you to adhere to some kind of daily structure. They need to be fed, watered, exercised, groomed - so even when you don't feel like doing these things for yourself, the fact they still need them is good to get you moving and away from thinking just about your self.

4. Animals will love you unconditionally no matter what most of the time. However, this is not a reason to use them as your focus of abuse, anger, guilt, etc - focusing your negative feelings onto them and then blaming their behavior as the problem. Animals, like children, are really a mirror to what is going on inside of you. If they begin to act out it is because your energy is the problem, not them. If you can't control your self, keep the animal somewhere safe and away from you until you can control your self. They are great motivation to get control over your self.

Exercise:

1. Exercise is important for several reasons. One of the most important is it will discharge the stress chemicals out of your body if you do some form of exercise when you feel yourself flooding with strong negative emotions or when you push negative emotion down.

2. Exercise is also good for depression. Exercise helps regulate the feel good chemicals in your body. Some studies have shown daily exercise is as effective as depression medication.

3. You can over exercise. After 30 minutes of intense exercise, your immune system begins to be suppressed. The longer you continue past 30 minutes, the more damage you are doing to your body. Intense exercise is the same chemical response as extreme stress so you are breaking your body down by doing too much in the same way as continued extreme stress causes problems.

4. Slow and rhythmic exercise such as gentle stretching, walking, slow bike riding, is very good for calming your body down. As long as your heart rate is kept fairly close to your resting rate, you can exercise for longer periods of time.

5. Exercise is a good way to spend time with others that is indirect and does not require you to talk about things you don't want to talk about.

Play/Laughter:

1. The older we get the less we play. Play is having fun without an agenda and is meant to involve laughter.

2. Laughter has many, many positive effects upon the body and brain. There can feel like nothing to laugh about when you are depressed and suicidal, but it is okay to take a break from your pain when you see something funny.

3. Laughter at the expense of another is not beneficial however.

Thinking and Meditation:

1. Much has been written and recommended about meditation to help heal the body and brain. However, it can be a very hard place to start when there are strong feelings of wanting to die. Instead of trying to keep your mind clear of all thought, it is easier to just learn to manage your thoughts - which is actually the primary purpose of meditation.

2. Manage your thinking. One of the big lies we have been taught is that our thinking and feelings control us and it is not us that should be controlling our thoughts and feelings. We believe "truth" is out in the world someplace and that is the end of it. However, our thoughts and feelings can be changed in any given moment and in fact, this is the place all your power lays.

3. You have the power to choose your thoughts which then leads to how you will feel. You are not helpless to either thought or feeling. However, it is like working a muscle. Most of us are very weak mentally and it takes time and training to choose our thoughts on purpose.

4. Strong feelings of suicide are hard to stop when you feel victim to them. However, you have the power to change your thoughts in any given moment. I want to die can become "yes, I want to die, but I also want to sit down." It doesn't have to be miracle stuff - just shift to anything but the repetitive "I want to die, I want to die," kind of thinking. Shift to something else you can focus on no matter how briefly just to prove to your self you have the power to do so.

5. Eventually you can begin to examine your thoughts for their reality. "I want to die" may not be what is really underneath that thought. It may be, "I don't know what to do about my wife leaving me and taking the kids," as the underlying issue.

6. Here's the big thing: Just because you believe something is true for you, doesn't mean it is true for everyone. This is the idea behind every war, every conflict, every problem. We have somehow told ourselves that if it is true for us, it has to be true for everyone. You may believe you deserve to die and that may feel true for you, but it is not true for how I feel about you or how many others feel about you. Society as a whole needs to question their beliefs on just about everything, but for today, you just need to allow for the idea that your belief you should die is not shared by anyone and therefore not 100% true.

7. There are many types of thinking that can get you into trouble. All or nothing, can't vs. won't, and many others. Nothing is absolute or black and white - questioning your thoughts is essential to healing.

Purpose:

1. Everyone needs a reason to get up in the morning - do you have one? This is SO essential, but we have created a world in which purpose for so many has been lost. Going to war feels like a very important purpose and then coming home it can feel just the opposite. It can feel like you are now without purpose which is a very hard place to be.

2. Having a purpose to get up each morning doesn't have to be something heroic or at a super hero level. It could be as simple as walking the dog, paying a bill, or phoning a friend to see how they are doing.

3. A purpose is often helpful when it is not just about you. Depression becomes a vacuum when it is all about you and what you are feeling. Doing something for someone else is a very powerful reminder there is more to this life than your problems. Again, you may not FEEL like doing anything for anyone, but when you do it without agenda or an expectation in return, it is often a reminder of what you have to give to this world and that is a very powerful purpose.

4. The opposite is also true. It is easy to get lost in only focusing on everyone but you. Rescue and refugee workers often get lost in the amount of pain and suffering they face every day and can't find their way back to a balanced place and sink into deep depressions or commit suicide.

Patience and Control:

1. It is hard to have patience when everyone wants things back to what they were before. The soldier home and happy. The family back together. Everything good again. Wanting to commit suicide is not something that starts quickly or heals quickly for anyone involved. Patience can feel like too much to ask after the patience of waiting for your loved one to come home and for you to get home.

2. Control is another side of patience. Patience is saying I can't control things right now and wanting to control something in your life can feel like the only way to make the painful feelings stop.

3. Not being able to control how you feel, what is happening to you, and so many other things in your life is not helpful when it feels hard to hold on to life itself. If you could control what is causing the pain or suffering inside, suicide would not be an issue. With control, there could be a solution to fixing whatever the problem was.

4. Solutions to problems are not something we can always demand, nor can we always control. Patience and control are both ideas that go hand in hand when dealing with a suicidal loved one and when one feels suicidal.

5. In addition, almost everything about a military life is not having control over your life. The foundation of a working military system is lack of control over your life and to not question orders, nor make demands. It is the essence of not having control over almost everything.

6. When there is a feeling of a lack of control there can also be the feeling of being a victim to what is controlling you. This is the place patience needs to come in. What we cannot control in one moment may

just require patience to get to the time when you can have control back. You can have control over whether you pull the trigger on a gun or not. But it takes patience to wait until you no longer want to pull that trigger. You can't control if you will be deployed again when you don't want to, but patience can get you through until the time when you can leave the military system.

Connection and Community:

1. Feelings of isolation because of what you have experienced can be very common. No one can understand what you have been through and this is true. One of the hardest things to adjust to after you have faced death and trauma is how silly and superficial life back at home can feel.

2. During times of intensity - war, crisis, disasters - people become very real. There are no games getting played, drama's going on, rather it is all about surviving in that moment. Once you have felt that level of intensity and connection to someone - your unit, your friends, your partners - coming home can feel like losing the only real connection and community you have had. To know you will die for someone and someone will die for you bonds you in a way that the average person cannot understand back home.

3. Vets helping vets is important because there is an understanding that can't be explained, only experienced.

4. However, the community and connection felt during war is something valuable that needs to find its way back to all of us during a crisis but also when things are calm. As a soldier and veteran you have a unique experience to "lead the charge" in many ways to help others in all walks of life - to have another's back is something everyone should know and feel in their life.

5. Communities also need to lead the charge in having our veterans and soldiers backs. It's about more than saying thank you or donating a few dollars - it is about healing for everyone involved and what is more important in this world?

What can a community do?

I once heard a story about a woman who had cancer and how her friends formed a community to support her. There were about 12 women who participated as a group. They divided tasks such as transporting to medical appointments, shopping, preparing food, cleaning - all the things that someone who lives alone undergoing chemotherapy would have

trouble doing alone. But by working as a group, no one person got overwhelmed and the feeling of a community working together brings blessings to everyone.

The same could be done for our veterans - only expanded. Veterans are facing all kinds of stresses when they return. Foreclosures, childcare issues, marital problems, health problems, and more. The VA system only focuses on the soldier or veteran, not the surrounding issues that compound any other mental or physical stresses.

In my experience as a social worker, those who need the most help rarely ask for it. The proud and independent will suffer in silence - they are also the same ones who will kill themselves and never let anyone know their pain. As a community we need to step in and offer help - as a way to empower them back to living an empowered life, not enabling them to be an eternal victim.

Businesses, church's, lawyers, therapists, and more all have skills that can help with the many stresses veterans face when coming home. Working as a community is something that is very much missing in our world but is also one of the most wonderful experiences there is. We wait until the crisis hits and then marvel how disaster brings out the best in people - why wait for the disaster and not find the best in your self now?

Helping really means this: no judging, no expectations, no enabling (doing for them what they need to do for themselves), and no controlling of their lives. Helping means let me lift you up a little until you are strong enough to lift your self up. Helping with childcare, transportation to medical appointments, mediating a divorce that doesn't put the veteran on the street, offering to teach a new job skill, anything that assists in transitioning the veteran back into this kind of life is helpful.

The community - a town, a church, a group, a family - needs to come together so that everyone wins. No one wins when veterans are thrown away because they no longer have a place in your community. This is really an idea that goes way beyond just veterans - but veterans are one place to start. We all need to find our way back to working together for the good of us all and not just focusing on what we, alone, can get out of this life.

Be creative and then share your success with the world so that others can find what works best in their community. Blog, put up video's, share with business associations your ideas and your successes - it will make you feel great. Helping someone feels much better than ignoring them or tearing them down.

Love/God/Creation:

1. These ideas are the basis of the second part of your healing process. But until the body and brain have healed enough to more fully explore what happened to you and what you want to do with that experience - ideas like love, God, or Creation itself can be a saving grace.

2. Love by itself isn't enough to stop someone from committing suicide nor is it enough to stop your self from committing suicide. But, it is a powerful force in this process. Giving and receiving love is a very powerful experience for everyone involved. The mind that is ready to die is often cut off from being able to feel love at all.

3. The power of prayer is also very important in these moments. Prayer is comforting for some and not for others - but prayer can be silent and given in a way that the recipient does not need to know.

4. Religion and love and God are not always the same thing. Feelings of guilt can conflict with religious ideologies and thus make things feel worse. Waiting until the first phase of healing has occurred is important before the bigger questions are asked and examined. It is okay to wait, because in the waiting healing can occur.

Conclusion

Viewed from the perspective of a limited physical world things like war, death, trauma, and suffering have no answer that will ever make sense. What does love have to do with war? Yet within war itself are acts of tremendous and holy love - the soldier who throws his body over a stranger to protect him, a villager who risks his life to save the life of his enemy, the woman who picks up her neighbors baby to nurse because the baby's mother is now lying dead on the ground.

It is in our own trauma and suffering and being witness to death and destruction that we often find the best of our own humanity and divinity. Trauma breaks us down to what can feel like our lowest point much in the same way that basic training breaks the soldier down to his or her lowest point. Both are meant to take a person apart so they can be built again. The soldier is then trained to follow orders and to not ask questions so that the military system can operate from an external focus of control.

But trauma does the opposite. It is meant to break us down to a place where we then question everything. The difference is the goal is to lead us to an internal focus of control - it goes against everything that military training taught - to not follow orders without question, but rather to question every thing in this life.

I have always believed there is a difference between a soldier and a warrior. A soldier follows a command regardless of the truth. A warrior follows truth regardless of a command. The path of a warrior can be a hero's path. But that doesn't mean that it is without trials and missteps. There is no greater teacher to the spirit than to live all perspectives: victim, perpetrator, and hero.

The desire to die can be the most empowering moment you will ever have. You are facing your own death and in that moment you can choose: to own responsibility for your life or to give it away to a force outside your self. It is the moment of choice between victim or hero, soldier or warrior, empowerment or defeat. This is a choice every soul in this Universe will ultimately have to make - and every soul will be given an infinite number of opportunities until they are ready to make the choice to live. Life is Love, God, Creation, and all that is good.

No matter what has happened in your past, what is happening now, or what you fear will happen in the future - just stop and breathe. One breath - that is all life is, just one breath at a time. Life is one choice at a time. Life is one moment at a time. And eventually, after many breaths, many choices, and many moments you will find a new life, one in which death is not part of every thought

Thoughts of suicide do not have to be the end, but in truth can be the beginning - of taking you beyond who you were and breaking down the barriers of your past so that you can move forward to become who and what you were meant to be in this life.

Trauma is a gateway to a higher purpose when you have the courage to move through it. Wanting to die is a normal reaction to intense pain and suffering. But you are more than your suffering and pain. You are meant to be more because of it...let time heal you so that you can discover the purpose in your pain. Just breathe and let time move you forward and one day you will understand your promise.

A Message for Families and Loved Ones

I want to try and give you just some kind of idea of what it feels like for the soldier or veteran you love. However, first I want to acknowledge how hard you are trying to love them and do what is best for them. You are in an impossible situation and not one in which you could have planned for or anticipated. What I have to say to you won't be easy to hear or probably what you want to hear. But that is what love is, giving what the other needs even when it is not what you want to give and when the outcomes are terrifying to consider.

I've been on both sides - the one that is traumatized and suicidal, but also trying to love and save the veteran I was involved with who was traumatized and suicidal. I'll be honest here - what you have been reading is much of what I learned to save my own life. But, what I knew at the time I was involved with Steven wasn't enough to save him. He chose to die by his own hand.

This is the one thing that is hardest to accept. If someone wants to die, there is nothing you can ultimately do to stop them. We are each responsible for our own choices and we are also responsible for their consequences. This is the hard truth that can feel unacceptable in this world.

With Steven, I had to make the choice in many ways to save my own life and family or to go down his road to self-destruction with him. I knew that there was nothing else I could do for him. I had to learn the very hard lesson that neither love nor the healthcare system was enough to save his life. He had to want to live and in the end, he did not choose to save his own life but to take it.

When I learned of his death I knew there was a second choice I needed to make. To grieve him and go on with my life or to stay stuck in the feelings of guilt that something I said, did, didn't do, or didn't say would have kept him alive. I chose to not live in guilt. It was a conscious choice and a purposeful choice to make. But it did not lessen the pain of his loss in any way.

It is an unbearable feeling of helplessness when we can't save the person we love and watch them self-destruct. But trying to save someone who is suicidal is similar to trying to save an addict - there comes a time when trying to help can cause more harm and push them farther away than to simply do nothing or to make the decision to let them go.

This is an even greater mandate when children are involved. It is unfair when two people come together to have children that the burden to keep them safe and well can fall on one person. War and families are a horrible combination because in the end, everyone loses. But for those who have children the reality is, that the spouse that was left behind may have to make the decision to keep the children safe.

The damage being done to soldiers is not just creating someone who is suicidal, but also someone who can hurt or kill. It is not an impulse that can always be controlled due to stresses, changes in the brain chemistry, brain injuries or traumas, or medications/drugs/alcohol.

The instinct for most male brains is to take their pain and act "outside" themselves. The instinct for most female brains is to take their pain and act "inside" themselves. This is one of the reasons we see more violence against others with men and more self-destructive behaviors turned on ones self with women. But this is not an absolute, just a generalization.

How these issues get handled within the family is a case by case scenario. In a perfect world, the well being and safety of everyone including the children would be the first concern. But all too often the children become the object of inflicting pain on each other instead of the focus of both parents concerns. The husband and wife then see themselves as the victims and the children get sacrificed in the process.

I know these words may feel harsh, but these are the moments in your life when every choice and action you take can have extreme consequences. And in all my years of working with people, their greatest pain is always the choices they made that hurt their families and loved ones. It is true when they are young as well as when they are old and dying.

Here is one of the hard facts about war. The person that went to war is not the person that came home from war. One of the greatest struggles in families and relationships is the feeling of frustration, anger, betrayal, and confusion about who this person now is. The same thing often happens when an addict gets clean and sober. The belief is now everything will be the way it should be- we'll all be happy and just pick up and go on. But it is rarely the case. The truth is, the real work has only just begun.

I can't promise you that your relationship will survive. The question you as the person who loves the soldier or veteran now has to ask yourself is: "How much do you want him or her to survive?"

This is a hard question. It is a grown up question. And it is a question that is very, very real. This is a man or woman you loved. This is a man or woman that may have children that love him or her. It is not a fair question. It is not a question that you ultimately have control over how it turns out. But it is a question that you need to answer honestly for your self.

You may have some hard choices to make and how you answer this question needs to guide those choices. I understand it can feel like it is you, reading this that is being put in the position of responsibility - and in some ways it is true. It is you who is less broken and hopefully not traumatized or suicidal. Hopefully you are able to see things more clearly right now and can react less from emotion and fear and more in a way that is best for everyone involved.

I want to try and describe how it can feel to be on the edge of suicide. The essence of it is really a survival mode. But I also want to add that there is a difference between someone who is truly suicidal and someone who is using the idea of suicide to manipulate and control you. This is where the help of a professional can be of great value. These are two very, very different states of mind. The purpose of what I am sharing here is to give you insight into the truly suicidal person.

It is impossible to understand the idea of survival mode if you have not experienced it for your self. The average person has had glimpses into this place of being. A period of fear for your safety, being hungry or thirsty without knowing when you will eat or drink, or going without sleep for long periods of time.

For the soldier or veteran they have had to be in a survival mode state of being for extended periods of time. The mental toll is just one aspect, there are also physiological changes which take place in the body and brain and can make the turning on or off of this state of being almost impossible to do.

The stress response, which is the body and brain response to surviving, is only designed to last for short periods of time - 30 minutes or so to run away from the tiger, fight the stranger, or hunker down as the tornado passes. When it is turned on for extended periods of time it is like the switch in the brain to turn it off breaks. A similar idea would be to have a car parked and running with the accelerator held to the floor. Eventually the car is going to break down because it is not designed to operate that way. The same is true for the body and brain.

One of the things that the 15 steps listed above do is allow the body and brain to heal. The discomfort is the time between the stress response

always being turned on and sitting through the discomfort of that until enough time where there is no stress can be experienced to let the accelerator off the floor and the stress chemicals removed from the body. Then, the healing needs to take place in the same way a broken bone takes time to mend and rebuild itself again.

What often happens is when the soldier or veteran returns to the home the family is also stressed and desperate to have help and get things back to normal. The stress of war is now replaced with the stress of life at home. And to make things more complicated, the soldier who has been living with life and death stress is now being asked to be upset by what feels unimportant in comparison to what they have just experienced.

When I worked in the emergency room and spent my night with a baby that died and then would come back to be faced with a pouting boyfriend because I was a little late was hard on the relationship. How does one compare to the other? The family member feels their concerns are important, but war changes the perspective of what is and is not important to get upset about.

Soldiers coming home are often slammed by the level of superficial and silly things we in the western world feel are important and upsetting. I refer to it as the hangnail scenario. You may be upset because you have a hangnail and feel that this is a crisis. But once you have experienced the reality of life and death - a hangnail is a very good day indeed.

The truth is we in the western or industrialized world are incredibly spoiled and soft. We have access to food and water 24/7, we expect to be entertained constantly, and our boredom can be a crisis. Even a homeless person can feed themselves off the amount of food that gets thrown away.

Now that is beginning to change here in America as we are descending into greater poverty, but still we have access to resources that reach well beyond what those in third worlds are living with and without.

When you have experienced the world in ways that your family members have not, it can be hard to join them in what they feel is important. Family gossip, drama, and priorities no longer feel important after you have watched friend and after friend die beside you or in your arms.

It is also true that in many ways the idea of feeling anything has been turned off. You can't survive in a war zone and get lost in your feelings of sadness and horror. You have to find a way to turn that switch off. The movie Catch-22 and television series MASH tried to show us some of that. When you can no longer cry, you've got to find a way to survive.

Some people just go numb and then they can't turn their feelings back on when they come home.

It is impossible to only feel good things in life. Feelings themselves demand we experience both and when pain and suffering are too much, one solution is to just shut everything down. Another is to get lost in distraction, work, alcohol, drugs, or other forms of numbing oneself.

This is confusing for the family when the soldier or veteran comes home. It takes time and effort to turn oneself back on so to speak - and if alcohol or drugs are involved, that needs to be dealt with first. And, trying to feel too much before you allow the brain and body to heal can actually create even greater trauma and wounding.

Asking your soldier to tell you what they experienced can do more harm than good. It is complicated - there can be guilt, shame, confusion, and also reliving the memories can be re-traumatizing if done too soon or in a way that is harmful.

When a person is in survival mode, here are some of the things they are experiencing:

- It is easy to get overwhelmed by the smallest events or conversations.
- Because the stress response is basically broken, it is difficult to cope with things that will seem basic or simple to you - their response to small things like a baby crying will seem out of context to the event itself.
- The idea of being on alert all the time may lead to over-reacting to perceived threats and result in fights that won't make sense to you.
- They may not be able to find a way to feel safe. Unable to sleep, stop looking around, distracted from you or the kids is hard to understand because you don't feel that way.
- It is an exhausting state to be in because the body's stress response is turned on so while they may look like they are being lazy or distracted or not helping out, the truth is it takes everything to just not fall apart.
- It is a fragile state of mind, even if the person denies it or is not really aware of this themselves. Any small request can feel like it's too much - it is the feeling of being overwhelmed, afraid, weak - not

things that a soldier will want to admit to you or themselves they are feeling.

- There are moment when all the person can do is sit in one place and wait for time to pass. This is really hard for families to watch or understand. We are a society that always wants to "do" something to fix whatever the problem is. But when you are in survival mode, sometimes just not doing anything is the only thing you can do.

When a person is in survival mode it is extremely difficult for anyone around them to know what to do. I can't give you an easy answer here because everyone will need something different. But it is a very fragile state for the veteran and if pushed too hard while they are in this place can be what will put them over the edge in terms of choosing suicide.

It is also while in this place that the individual who is suicidal needs to make their own decision - do I want to live or die? You can't stay in survival mode forever. The body begins to break down from the strain and stress. This is what makes it so hard to be a witness to as someone who loves this soldier or veteran. You want to step in and help. But you can't make the decision for life for them...we all must choose for ourselves if we want to live or die.

But it is also while in this place that the tiny ray of hope I talked about in the beginning can take hold. Having been in this place of survival mode for much of my life it was tiny things that would find there way to me that would keep me holding on.

Knowing my dog depended on my to walk and feed him kept me alive for almost a decade because I committed to him I would live as long as he was alive. Sometimes it was a quote, a moment in a movie, a phrase in a song, or just the idea that I couldn't do anything today so I would hang on for one more day.

But one of the most powerful things that kept me going was hearing other people's stories who did choose life. They were stories of those who conquered great odds or endured tremendous suffering and I would be inspired by their hope and their life. I would think about what had happened to me, hear what had happened to them and think they went through much worse, if they can hold on so can I.

One of the greatest differences that soldiers and veterans face in the battle for not committing suicide is dealing with their guilt over what they may have done or participated in during war. Innocence is lost when you are witness to violence, trauma, and death - and even more so when you are the cause of that violence, trauma, and death.

This is not an easy topic nor does it have an easy solution. But it is NOT the starting place in the healing process. I began all of this with the idea that we as a society must learn to value life. This means all life and it is not our place to judge who deserves life and happiness.

This means that the life of those who may have killed or hurt or tortured during war is just as valuable as yours. As a country who sends men and women to war we need to own responsibility for what happens during that war and blaming the soldiers is not accepting the responsibility that is ours to own.

Every soldier and veteran will have to find a way to make their peace and find their own meaning in what happened to them. But no one has the authority to judge or condemn them because we are all responsible for the war itself.

The greatest gift we can give our soldiers and veterans is the time and space to heal without our judgments or condemnations. You do not have to agree with the acts of war, but we all have to as a society accept responsibility for allowing war to happen.

Loving your soldier or veteran can take tremendous courage and commitment. But that is what love is. Sometimes it means holding on and sometimes it means letting go. Finding support for your self from others who are experiencing the same thing may be helpful. There is no easy or simple answer I can offer you, but only to say thank you for loving the man or woman you want to save.

Author

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