

PTSD Bytes – Audio Transcription

Episode #:	22
Guest:	Jessica Hamblen, PhD
Working title:	#22: Personal experiences with PTSD: AboutFace

Audio clip 1:

My name is Corporal Bradley Joseph Seitz. Kate Weber. Jerry Reed. Will Sanchez. And I have PTSD. I have PTSD. I have PTSD. Treatment has really saved my life. Treatment has turned my life completely around. I'm a living testimony, it helped me. Quit beating yourself up and go get help. You know you need help, so...go get it.

Pearl:

Welcome and thank you for tuning in to PTSD Bytes, the podcast where we invite experts to talk about PTSD and mental health, and how technology like mobile mental health apps can help. I'm your host Pearl McGee-Vincent and I'm a clinical psychologist at the Veteran's Affairs National Center for PTSD.

Pearl:

You just heard clips of Veterans sharing their experiences with PTSD and treatment. Those clips are from a website called AboutFace. And joining us today to tell us more is Dr. Jessica Hamblen. Dr. Hamblen is the Deputy Director for Education at the National Center For PTSD. And Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth. Welcome Dr. Hamblen.

Jessica:

Thanks so much for having me.

Pearl:

Hearing Veterans speak to their experience with PTSD and treatment is so moving. Can you tell us more about the AboutFace website and why the National Center for PTSD decided to make it?

Jessica:

Sure. Our goal with AboutFace is to help Veterans with PTSD recognize their PTSD symptoms and to break down some of the barriers that can keep people from getting help. And unfortunately many people don't talk about it with other people, which means they don't have natural opportunities to learn about PTSD from others. So we created the site so that it would feel like you're having an intimate conversation with a friend who's talking to you about their PTSD, and how treatment helped them. And we call the site AboutFace because we believe that PTSD treatment can turn your life around, so you can make an AboutFace.

Pearl:

Excellent. What can viewers expect to see and hear when they visit AboutFace?

Jessica:

The majority of the videos are interviews where a Veteran is answering a specific question. But there are also some longer stories that take you through the arc of a Veteran's life, from what their PTSD is like and then how treatment helped them. We also have videos of clinicians talking about what to expect in

treatment, and from family members who talk about what it's like for them to live with somebody with PTSD.

Pearl:

What kinds of people did you interview for the videos?

Jessica:

We tried to select Veterans from all branches of service with a wide range of ranks and backgrounds. So the Veterans are diverse with respect to their age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation and the type of trauma that they experienced.

Pearl:

It sounds like there's a wide variety of videos on AboutFace. How can people sort through everything?

Jessica:

So right now you can either pick an interview question that you want to hear the answer to, or you could browse through those longer stories. But we're excited to launch a redesigned site that offers more of what's going to be a guided path through the videos. There are certain messages that we hoped people would get from coming to the site, like the message that PTSD treatment works and that there's hope.

Pearl:

Is the site only for Veterans?

Jessica:

It's made with Veterans as the intended audience. But PTSD really looks similar across different types of traumas and the treatments are all the same. So we think it would be useful for all trauma survivors.

Pearl:

And you brought some more clips with you from AboutFace so our listeners can get a better idea of what's on the site. Can you set this first clip up for us?

Jessica:

I'd love to. To start off with, let's listen to Jeff McDowell describe what PTSD was like for him.

Audio clip: Jeff McDowell:

I mean, it wasn't long after we got home that we moved out to the country, which is really nice. It's about 400 yards from the front gate to my door. So you aren't going to make it to my house before somebody hasn't, something hasn't seen you. I've got dogs and geese that let me know everything that goes on the property. So I mean, you find yourself just surrounding yourself with all these safety measures so you can relax. You don't think about it at first and after a while you think, wow, that's ridiculous, but you do it.

Pearl:

We know that many people who experience trauma feel a lot of shame – shame for what happened to them, having PTSD and other problems, even shame for getting treatment. Is that something this website addresses?

Jessica:

Absolutely. I want to play a clip of Steve Connor, who's a male military sexual trauma survivor. And he's talking about the first time he told his therapist that he had been sexually assaulted.

Audio clip: Steve Connor:

When I was able to tell my therapist what happened to me for the first time in in my life, I cried. And that was a huge release. It just, I had probably wanting to have done that for 30 years 'cause... But I was a, I was a man and um, a dad and a husband and you can't be vulnerable, you can't be weak, you got to... And to be able to just do that was the first time I got to just be me. And say, this really hurts. Because it did.

Jessica:

Next I'd like to share Sherie Warner and she's talking about how guilt kept her from asking for help.

Audio clip: Sherie Warner:

I have a lot of guilt for the, the people that didn't make it back or made it back in pieces or had to come back without people that they were brothers with and sisters with. And that makes it hard for me to, to validate my own experience because there are so many people that experience worse. But that doesn't mean that what I experienced wasn't impossible. I spent a year in a war zone. People were trying to kill me. Um, and I had to be prepared to kill other people if necessary. And that isn't how I was designed. I wasn't designed to do that as a human being. I wasn't designed for that and it's okay that I'm not okay with that.

Jessica:

And finally, some people don't get help because they don't even know what the problem is. In this clip, Yvonne Grissett will explain what it was like for her.

Audio clip: Yvonne Grissett:

I just had, um, all of these things going on, behaviors that I felt were abnormal and, um, kind of baffling. You know, I didn't really know why I did some of the things that I did, um, prior to my diagnosis of PTSD. And once I was diagnosed, it really came together. Um, and I was able to say, wow, that's why I did that, that's why I did it.

Pearl:

We've heard some powerful examples of what having PTSD can feel like and how difficult it can be to even recognize that you have it, let alone talk to someone else about it. If someone is considering getting professional help for PTSD, how might this website help them?

Jessica:

Hopefully the site shows Veterans all the ways in which their lives can be better. Treatment doesn't just improve PTSD symptoms. For example, listen to Eddie Hoffman explain how treatment made him happier and more confident.

Audio clip: Eddie Hoffman:

I've learned to look at situations differently. Everything in-, that's happened in my past made who I am today. I'm, I'm, I'm very confident now. I'm very, uh, happy with who I am. So it's really made it-, made me feel like all the things in my past, good or bad, are actually a positive, uh, thing because it's got me where I'm at and I'm happy with who I am. And my confidence in myself, in liking myself was probably one of the, um, biggest things I got out of treatment. And I started thinking I'm more future oriented where I have goals now and everything I do is related to those goals. So I feel it's helped me in many ways.

Pearl:

We've heard some really inspiring stories today. And let's say I'm someone who has PTSD and maybe now I'm thinking about getting help. I've heard the words treatment and therapy and I have a vague idea that I'd be talking to someone, but I don't really know what that means. How can I use AboutFace to learn more about what PTSD treatment is like?

Jessica:

Right now under the stories tab, there are descriptions of three types of talk therapy that have all been shown to work the best for PTSD. And for each treatment, a Veteran explains what it was like for them to go through the therapy. Here's a quick description from Reedy Hopkins on how therapy helped him see things differently.

Audio clip: Reedy Hopkins:

When you can walk through it with a trained professional, and that doesn't mean your buddy or your buddies that went through it with you, that means a trained professional. If you can walk through it with them, they have a way of, of making you look at it from all the angles, not just the one perception that you have, you look at it from all the angles. And that's what it took for me was to look at it from many different angles. Not saying it was right or wrong, it was just looking at different angles to give me a different mindset. And hopefully-, and for me, it, it allowed me to see things a little bit differently and a little clearer, and make a little more sense of what happened that day.

Pearl:

Wonderful. So to wrap up, do you have any take home messages for our listeners today?

Jessica:

First, we hope that Veterans and family members will try out AboutFace and watch some of the videos. We also hope that providers will use the site and that they will share clips to encourage Veterans who are unsure if they're ready for treatment to give it a try. And then I also want to thank both Vicky Bippart, who's our producer and director of AboutFace, as well as all of the Veterans who have been willing to share their stories. And finally, I want to leave you with some advice from the Veterans on AboutFace.

Audio clip 2:

PTSD isn't something that is just going to go away on its own. Treatment works. It helps. There's no shame in treatment. Just do it. Your world will be so different afterwards. It's a warrior sickness, it's not a coward sickness. Never too late. I guarantee you, it'll help you. It will change your life. It turned my life around. You can find peace. I never thought I could feel this good. Walk through those doors, take the step. Go get help. It's the best and bravest thing you could ever do. Treatment works.

Pearl:

Thank you again to Dr. Hamblen and the AboutFace Team, and to all the Veterans for sharing their stories. To check out the AboutFace website, go to www.PTSD.va.gov/AboutFace.

Andrea:

Hello, this is Dr. Andrea Jamison and I'm the executive producer of PTSD Bytes. Catch new episodes by following or subscribing to PTSD Bytes on your preferred podcast app. Thank you for joining us.