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Virtual reality helps vets deal with PTSD

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(POOL/CNN) - Veterans suffering from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are getting better with the help of a new treatment that uses virtual reality exposure therapy.

Joshua Musser, a [Marine veteran](#), enlisted in the Marine Corps and was sent to Iraq where he fought in the battle of Fallujah - the bloodiest battle of the war.

"You get home and get used to being home and everything. And all of the sudden it kind of levels out and then you know the nightmares start," Musser said.

As a Marine, Musser thought he would be able to control his feelings.

"For you to actually admit that 'I'm struggling and it's something that I can't control,' because to a Marine they can control everything. We adapt, we overcome," he said.

Help came in the form of virtual reality exposure therapy. Under the helmet, Musser experience the sights, smells, vibrations and sounds of war - a customized scenario targeted specifically to treat his psychological trauma.

"People often try not to think about what happened to them and what we found over time is that's the worst thing you can do when you experience a trauma," Clinical Psychologist Dr. Maryrose Gerardi said. "If you don't think about it, don't process it and deal with it that's what can eventually can cause PTSD and chronic problems."

A psychologist talks with patients as they use the helmet.

"They put you back in Iraq where you have one foot here and one foot there," Musser said.

"And so when she sees that I'm really starting to stress out, cause I would shake really bad and I would sweat. But she would be in my ear and pulling me back," he said.

Musser was also feeling withdrawn from his newborn son, which further motivated him to seek treatment.

"That was killing me. And so that's one of the main reasons why I went to get help and that's one of the main reasons why I wanted to do something as fast as possible," he said. "And that's why I chose Virtual reality. Even though I knew it was going to be tough, I knew it was going to be painful. I felt like it was going to help, I hoped that it was gonna help."

Three months after being treated, Musser's doctors said his PTSD levels have significantly improved. Musser said he knew he would never be rid of the problem, but he was learning to control it.

"And I feel 100 times better than I have," he said.

He said now he can be a father.

"Now I can play with him and he [calls](#) me 'daddy.' And he kisses me, you know he'll run up and hug me and I can enjoy every second I have with him. It's a blast. Now I can harness all those emotions and now I can feel things. And that's worth everything I went through."

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A psychologist sits with the patient and talks them through a virtual world simulating their time in Iraq. (Source: POOL/CNN)



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