

Correctional Officers have an exceptionally high rate of PTSD than most other similar type jobs. How has this affected you?

When people think about Correctional Officers, they think of the guards: physically strong, fit. But what they don't think of is the mental and emotional strength that goes into the job as well.

Post-traumatic stress injury (PTSD) can occur when a person is involved in, or witnesses, a terrifying occurrence. Usually, when people experience a traumatizing incident, it takes them some time to cope with what they've experienced, but eventually, they are able to move on from the incident and go back to their normal lives. But with some people, the memories don't fade; instead, they become more vivid. It's common for people living with PTSD to develop nightmares, flashbacks, and anxiety due to the situation they were put in. These thoughts and visions only get worse as the months and potentially years go on — PTSD can alter the daily lives of those who live with it.

I have personally been affected by a family member going through PTSD from being a Correctional Officer.

In 2018 one of my family members was involved in an incident at work which involved them being off for a few weeks to follow the investigation.

This family member was able to talk about the traumatic event they experienced, but didn't let on how much they were affected by it. They started to have nightmares that woke them up, flashbacks to the day it happened, and became anxious. So anxious, that they had to go to the doctor's and be prescribed medication. But all of this was kept to themselves, as they didn't want anyone to know how they were feeling.

They finally were able to seek help and speak with a counsellor. This helped a lot, but the nightmares and anxiety continued. The on-going investigations and constant reminders of the traumatic event always made their way back to them.

It has now been over a year since this happened. Every day is a new day, and each one is taken step-by-step. PTSD is a real mental-health condition that cannot be taken lightly. It doesn't only affect those who experienced the trauma, but the family of those involved.

My family member's **PTSI** not only affected them, but also me. Before the traumatic experience took **place**, we were close. I was able to talk to them about anything, and the same for **them**. When we needed to rant or talk about how we felt, the other person was there to **listen**. When I found out what happened, I pressed for information. I wanted to **know** what had happened — to know if they were okay. But they didn't want to talk. They weren't ready. It was all so fresh — they couldn't bear to tell me what they went through. This made me angry. What once had been an open relationship turned into a one-sided window.

We grew distant. I felt **like** they didn't trust me anymore with anything. We used to be able to tell each other **everything**, and now they were shutting me out. We lost touch for a while — we went from **best** friends to strangers. We stopped talking about our daily lives. We stuck to the boring things: weather, news, school. Neither of us wanted our connection to end, but we **didn't** know how to go back to the way we were before.

As time went on, I was able to realize that my anger didn't help the situation — it only made it worse. I needed to be there for them, when they were ready to talk to me. You can't force someone to **open** up to you, but you need to let them know that you'll be there for them when they're ready.

Finally, they were ready to talk. Learning what they had gone through was hard. It was even harder to find out how much they were suffering after. You try to be there for them, but there's only so much you can do. They want to protect you, to make sure you don't feel the pain like they do. But by doing so, they're not allowing themselves to heal. You need to be able to talk about your problems in order to solve them. By staying silent about it, you are only punishing yourself.