

Episode 37: When Current Events are Triggering



National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255.
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*****Brady legal music*****

JJ

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*****Brady musical introduction*****

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JJ

All right. Thank you so Ted much for coming on. Can you introduce yourself really quick for us?

Ted

Yeah. My name is Ted Bonar. I'm a clinical psychologist based in Columbus, Ohio.

JJ

And how about yourself, Dr. Hunter?

Kyleanne

Hi. I'm Ky Hunter, Vice President for Programs here at Brady and also a Marine Corps combat veteran.

JJ

And I'm having you both on today because...let's just be frank. The news has been awful.

Kyleanne

Everything is on fire.

JJ

Yeah, and so we just thought it be really important to pull you both on really quickly, because of a really phenomenal podcast that I think that you did on... basically veterans and suicide.

Ted

Yeah.

JJ

And I was really worried for a lot of veterans that I love today. And so I thought that this was a podcast that had to happen. Really quickly.

Kyleanne

I think I'd like Ted to handle this from more of, a clinical side of it. But I think from a from a very personal emotional side, you know, I can speak to a really involuntary feeling of dread, bad, reliving a lot of your past, experiences by seeing, seeing things on the on the news like I know., um, last night I was texting JJ and Ted with both of you, about seeing el Assad, a place that I flew into hundreds of times, a place that was really the safe place. Like there were these, these physical exhales when you'd show up at al Assad because it means that like you're you're safe and your back. Seeing it attacked, was really there is this visceral response to the place that in the midst of chaos and war was the safe place, seeing that being being attacked with something and just the physical, visceral reaction of feeling both the positive emotions that I had had felt there comeback, but also the negative emotions of losing my friends and questioning things and really...feeling them was an experience I hadn't viscerally had before. So I can speak to that. But, you know, Ted, I would love to hear from you some of the more, the more clinical side we see people really are triggered. What does it mean?

Ted

Well, it's a great question. We hear things in the news or we see images that remind a person of you know of what they have lived. Right? And there could be this re experiencing. So you see something and it starts a symptom chain of re experiencing. I'm there again, right? That's a very symptomatic way to look at it, right? But that's, you know, if I'm talking about symptoms, I'm talking about a clinical condition like PTSD, right? And there's there's no doubt that news like last night or images like last night can start ...can activate somebody's symptoms of a clinical condition, right? And somebody could even have recovered from a clinical condition, but it would reactivate the memories of this is what happened when I was there. I feel like I am there again, and from there a chain reaction of I feel horrible. Something like that can happen.

Ted

What I just described a minute ago is this idea of triggering a clinical condition, you know, what we saw last night that--I want to be careful about how I say this is horrible news, right? But if there was trauma that was triggering, that's what happened to a person before. That's what PTSD is. The news last night wasn't necessarily, I'd argue, traumatizing right, and I think it's important to clarify. We use that word trauma so often that we can, we can say "Oh, this is horrible news and I feel awful" and we could say "I'm being traumatized by it," where I think it's really important to say no, this is awful. It's horrible. And I don't have to feel as though this is a trauma that is recurring, right?

Kyleanne

And I think it can help us work through processing the feelings of it, of recognizing that I'm remembering and seeing things that have happened to me in the past, and this is re-bringing up those memories of things that happened to me in the past. They're not things happening to me right now, and that's, I think, the first step for moving through.

Ted

That's right. It doesn't make the news any better, right? But it makes maybe how we react to it a little bit different, right? Does a person relive something? Have to relive it...well, sometimes that just happens. And that's the condition of post traumatic stress disorder. Other times, and honestly, this is for most people, this is a really horrible thing that makes us feel really bad. But it might not rise to the level of a clinical condition, and that can make it ...right? Help. How do I reach out for help? Then how can somebody else support somebody?

Kyleanne

Well, I think one thing that's important to note here and it really builds off what Ted was just saying is that I think this is a time of great confusion. You know, it's a time where people are...there is sort of this reliving of past traumas. There is also a sort of struggling with "how do you react to news this bad?" You know, even if you're saying I'm not being traumatized, but it's bad, it's horrible news. How do I react to it? What do I do it? And so there's these feelings of confusion and confusion so often leads to despair. Your despair, sort of the national outgrowth of I'm confused. I don't know what to do. There doesn't seem to be any clear answers. Despair is the next space, and then you compound isolation with it.

Kyleanne

A lot of the individuals you have veterans that we're talking about in in this case who were who were in Iraq now live very far flung from support networks. I am incredibly fortunate to have a really good support network, but not everybody does. And... you have access to guns, and there are access to guns that are attached to those memories. So when you add now, confusion, despair are bad news, plus guns, it's it's really, I think, in an all too easy situation where a temporary tragedy which this really is for any individuals we're talking about, turns into a permanent tragedy. Because there's a thought of There's nothing else I can do, and I'm seeing everything fall apart until I may as well be gone, too. And so I think that's where it becomes complicated. And I think Ted, you know what? What, what are the best steps someone who's looking to get help can take and what are what are the steps that if you have a friend or loved one who you think needs---

JJ

help---

Kyleanne

Yeah, could use a little extra extra support with dealing with bad news.

Ted

Yeah, you know, I want to have even one other idea to that. Um, you know, Ky, you're, you really broke down the chain of how it can go from bad news to confusion, to despair. And then it can go to hopelessness and, you know, and that's a dangerous place for somebody who's who's maybe already struggling with something or has a history and might be thinking of taking their life. One thing that I think is important, Ky you started talking about, you know, maybe it was 10 minutes ago when you were talking about you know, how you feel having been there. And it's so easy to overlay current events onto past experiences and then to take this meaning as well. What did it mean? You know, I feel betrayed because this bad news, I feel like, Well, what was it worth? What I did,

Ted

You know, if a service member put their lives on the line and then the bad news is confusing and despairing, you can retroactively say, "Well, my service and my sacrifice and the people that I lost, it was for nothing." I want to offer this other thought, though, that the news of today I don't think should devalue the service and the sacrifice that somebody made in their life when they were living it. It could be confusing in real time when there are people who we know people who are over there, veterans who have been, you know, maybe you were just separated who might be feeling this very deeply and very personally, I wouldn't devalue any of their experiences or what it meant that they did that I did. I wanted to offer that thought. I, um I think that could be so confusing when the news is so hard. As far as uh, what to do?

Ted

Guns are too effective, right? If somebody has had 10 drinks, I'm gonna ask somebody if I can hold their keys. Um, that doesn't take away their constitutional right to drive. It means it's not a great time to drive right. It's not a great time to drive if you've had 10 or 15 drinks and we kind of accept that these days in our world, right? Well, I think with guns. If somebody is thinking of suicide or if somebody has been triggered or somebody is really upset and into this despair and hopelessness, it's not the time to have the weapon at the ready, right. It's the time to say I wonder if somebody else can hold on to my ammunition. I wonder if I can separate the ammunition from the weapon and and I can make sure that somebody that I know in trust maybe has the key to the gun lock. Safe storage at this time when it's so confusing, there's nothing more important.

Ted

So I'd say that as far as what other people can do for veterans, it's..It can be simple. It can be check in. It can be say, "Hey, I'm thinking of you, how are you doing? I've been thinking of you since since this is so hard". What I don't think we need to do is try to solve it, and what I mean by that is personally between me and a friend who is a veteran. I don't feel the need, nor can I say, "Here's how it's gonna be. Here's how it's gonna work. " You know, I don't feel the need to, I think it would be ineffective for me to support a veteran in , a veteran in my life friend or family member, by trying to make sense of it. What I'd rather do is say, T"his is so hard. It's confusing. It's upset.ing. This is awful. I've been thinking of you all day. You know anything you need from me? What are you going through? Uh, do you want to talk about you? Good? Have you checked in on your your buddies? Have you checked in on your friends?" This is a community effort, right? This is we're there for each other, individually and collectively in a time like this. That's not the same thing as fixing a problem? It's" I'm there for you and then we take it from there. Do you need help?" Right?

Ted

If we need to. Aa, give a support network to somebody in a phone number, the easiest invest is 24 hours, is the national Suicide Prevention Lifeline on the phone number. The number on that is 1 802 723825. And if you're a military or veteran, you simply press one, and you will get a veteran who understands a suicide crisis and who understands the military veteran experience and is trained and knowing how to talk about a crisis when it's happening and can help find further resource is, you know, that's crisis. If it's less than a crisis, I want to be there for each other, right? Does that make sense? All those things I said?

Kyleanne

And when you're reaching out to your friends, ask the hard questions.

JJ

Well, thank you so much, Ted. Thank you so much, Ky. I really appreciate you both hopping on on what I know is a very busy day for you for this very hard thing. So thank you. I love you both.

*****music plays*****

JJ

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*****Brady musical outro*****

Selected citations:

“The Truth About Suicide and Guns.” Brady. Accessed January 10, 2020.
<https://www.bradyunited.org/reports/suicide-prevention-report-2018>.