

The PTSD Marriage Blueprint™

How to Stay Connected When Your Spouse Keeps Pushing You Away

> **Please read this first.** I'm sharing what I've learned from living this life, not giving medical or therapeutic advice. Nothing here replaces professional PTSD treatment, counseling, or medical care. If you or your spouse are in crisis, please reach out to a qualified professional. And if you ever feel unsafe, your safety comes first — always. We'll talk about that directly later in these pages, because it matters that much.

When the Person You Love Feels a Million Miles Away

Let me guess how some of your days go.

You're in the same house. Maybe even the same room. And somehow you've never felt more alone in your life. You say something and get one word back, or nothing at all. You reach out and feel them pull inward, like a door closing in slow motion. And the worst part isn't even the silence — it's the not knowing. *Did I do something? Are they mad at me? Is this my fault? Is this ever going to get better?*

I know that feeling because I've lived it. I'm not going to tell you my whole story, because this isn't about me and I want to protect the person I love. But I will tell you this: I've stood exactly where you're standing. I've felt the loneliness of loving someone who couldn't reach back. And I found my way through it — not by luck, and not because my situation was somehow easier than yours.

Here's what I brought to it that most spouses don't have: I studied psychology in college, so I understood a little about what was happening in the mind. And I spent years working in a nursing home, which taught me how to show up patiently for someone even when they can't give anything back. Those two things became the foundation of everything I'm about to share with you.

But here's what I want you to understand right now, before we go one step further: **you already have the most important thing.** You care enough to be reading this. That love, that commitment — that's the raw material. Everything else is just knowing what to do with it. And that's exactly what I'm going to give you.

What's actually possible here

I'm not going to promise you a fairy tale. What I'm going to promise you is this: within the next week, if you follow what's in these pages, you can experience a real moment of connection with your spouse again. Not a full transformation. Not everything fixed. Just one crack of light — one moment where they open up instead of shutting down, where you feel *them* again for a second.

When you've been hitting a wall for months, that one moment feels like everything. Because it tells you the door isn't locked. It was just closed. And closed doors can be opened.

That's what **The PTSD Marriage Blueprint™** is for.

What's Really Happening When They Push You Away

Before any tools or techniques, you need one shift in understanding. This one insight changes everything, and honestly, if you took nothing else from this whole guide but this, it would still be worth it.

When your spouse pushes you away, it is not a rejection of you. It's the PTSD talking.

Read that again. Sit with it for a second.

PTSD does something specific to the brain. It keeps a person stuck in survival mode — their nervous system is bracing for threat even when there's no threat in the room. When someone is in that state, closeness can actually feel *dangerous* to them, even closeness with the person they love most. So they withdraw. They go quiet. They snap, or they disappear inside themselves. Not because they've stopped loving you. Because their brain is trying to protect them the only clumsy way it knows how.

Here's the truth I most wish someone had told me early on: **they still love you, even when they push you away.**

That pushing-away is not the opposite of love. It's what love looks like when it's trapped behind a wall of fear and pain.

Why this one shift matters so much

When you *don't* understand this, you take the behavior personally. And when you take it personally, you react — you argue back, you pull away to protect yourself, you get resentful, or you push harder to get through. All of those responses, understandable as they are, make the wall thicker.

When you *do* understand this, everything changes about how you respond. You stop defending yourself against an attack that was never really an attack. You stop reading rejection into a moment that was actually about their pain. You get to stay calm — and your calm becomes the safest thing in their world.

Let me show you how to translate what you're seeing, because the behaviors have a hidden language once you learn to read them.

What the Pushing-Away Really Means

What You See	What It Feels Like to You	What's Actually Happening
Going silent, one-word answers	"They don't want me around"	Overwhelmed nervous system conserving energy
Snapping over something small	"I can't do anything right"	Pain overflowing, not aimed at you
Wanting to be alone	"They're shutting me out"	Seeking safety, not distance from you
"Maybe we should split up"	"They're giving up on us"	Testing if you'll abandon them too
Flinching from touch or closeness	"They don't love me anymore"	Closeness registering as threat

Keep this nearby for the first couple of weeks. When a hard moment hits, glance at the middle column, then move your eyes to the right column. That small habit retrains how you interpret what's in front of you — and that changes how you respond in real time.

Does this mean you have to become a saint who never gets hurt? Absolutely not. Your feelings are real and they matter — we'll take care of *you* too, I promise. But understanding what's underneath the behavior is the ground everything else stands on.

The Blueprint, Simply

So what actually *is* The PTSD Marriage Blueprint™?

It's not therapy. It's not a rigid program. It's a way of showing up that creates safety for a person whose nervous system is starving for it — and safety is the exact thing that lets them open back up to you.

The whole Blueprint rests on four pillars. You don't have to master them all at once. You just have to start.

1. **Understand** — Read the behavior for what it really is (you just started this above).
2. **Signal** — Build a shared language so hard periods stop causing confusion and hurt. This is the *Anniversary Days* system.
3. **Connect** — Use specific low-pressure tools that open doors when words fail.
4. **Sustain** — Keep your own strength alive so you can keep showing up without running dry.

Everything from here builds on those four. Let's walk through each one with the actual, do-it-today details.

Anniversary Days: Building a Language Just for the Two of You

This one came out of my own marriage, and it's the tool I'm proudest of. It's simple, and it works.

Here's the problem it solves. During hard periods, your spouse can't always explain what's happening. They don't have the words, or the words feel too heavy to say. So you're left guessing — *is it me, is it something I said, is it us?* — and that guessing game is where so much of the loneliness and hurt lives.

So instead of forcing a conversation they can't have, you create a shared signal ahead of time. A word, a phrase, a code you both agree on that simply means: *"This is a hard stretch for me right now. It's not about you. I still love you. I just need to get through this."*

In my marriage, these became known as **anniversary days** — the hard periods that come around, sometimes tied to dates, sometimes not. Once we had a name for them, everything got easier. When one hit, we both knew what it meant. No guessing. No hurt feelings. No interrogation. Just understanding.

How to create yours this week

You don't need your spouse to sit through a big serious talk to set this up. In fact, keep it light. Here's how:

1. **Pick a calm moment** — not during a hard stretch, but on an ordinary steady day.
2. **Introduce it gently.** Something like: *"I've been thinking — when things get heavy for you, I don't always know how to help, and I don't want to make it worse by guessing. What if we had a little signal, just between us, so you can let me know it's a hard time without having to explain it? No pressure, just so I know to give you what you need."*

3. **Let them help choose the word or phrase.** This is important — when *they* pick it, it becomes *theirs*, and they'll actually use it. It could be "hard month," "anniversary day," "heavy today," a color, anything. There's no wrong answer.

4. **Agree on what it means and what you'll do.** Usually it means: *I'll give you space, I won't take it personally, and I'm still here.*

> **If your spouse isn't ready to talk about it yet:** that's okay. You can still use a version of this on your own. Simply start naming it gently for yourself when you notice the signs — "I think this is a hard stretch for you, and that's okay, I'm here." You're planting the language even before they're ready to plant it with you. Many spouses come around to it once they see you're not going to weaponize it against them.

Write your signal down here so it's real:

Our signal word or phrase: _____

What it means when either of us uses it: _____

The magic of this tool is that it turns the most confusing part of your week — the not-knowing — into something you both understand. That alone can lift a huge weight off your shoulders.

The Connection Tools That Open Doors When Words Fail

These are the tools you'll use in the actual moments — when your spouse is pulling away and you feel that familiar helplessness rising. Each one is low-pressure by design, because pressure is exactly what a PTSD nervous system can't handle. You're not trying to force the door open. You're just showing it isn't locked from your side.

Tool 1: The Door-Opening Question

When you feel that wall go up and your mind starts spinning with *did I do something wrong* — instead of stewing in it, ask, gently and without any edge in your voice:

"Are you mad at me?"

That's it. Four words. But look at what they do:

- They open a door without pushing anyone through it.
- They give your spouse an easy chance to say *"No, it's not you"* — which reassures both of you at once.
- They replace the awful guessing game with one small, honest exchange.

When I first started asking this, it was hard. It felt vulnerable. But over time it opened into something bigger. Eventually the answer became something like *"No — things are just hard for me right now."* And that honesty is what led us to naming our anniversary days in the first place. One small question can crack open a whole new way of talking to each other.

› **Heads up on this one:** the first few times, you may get a short or flat answer. Don't read failure into that. You're not fishing for a deep conversation — you're just showing the door is open. Ask it calmly, accept whatever answer you get, and let it be. The safety you create by *not* pushing is the whole point.

Tool 2: The Safe Touch

When words are too much for them, your body can say what your voice can't. A soft hand on the shoulder. Sitting close on the couch without needing to talk. A gentle hug from the side.

But — and this matters enormously — it has to be **soft, gentle, and non-demanding**. Not grabby. Not needy. Not touch that's asking for something back. Just a quiet physical presence that says *"I'm here, and I'm not going anywhere."*

The difference between touch that heals and touch that intrudes is entirely in the *how*. Demanding touch says *"give me reassurance."* Safe touch says *"I'm offering you mine."* One adds pressure; the other removes it.

How to do it right:

- **Start small and low-stakes** — a hand on the shoulder as you pass by, not a full embrace that requires a response.
- **Don't require anything back.** No expectation of a hug returned, no words needed.
- **Watch their body.** If they lean in or soften, stay. If they stiffen, ease off gently — no hurt feelings, no drama. You've still sent the message.

– **Let it be brief.** A few seconds of safe contact can say more than a long embrace they weren't ready for.

› **If your spouse can't tolerate touch right now:** some can't, especially during the hardest stretches, and that's not a rejection either. In that case, use *presence* instead — simply being in the same room, quietly, without demands. Physical nearness is its own kind of safe touch.

Tool 3: The Quiet Commitment

This is the most powerful tool in the whole Blueprint, and it's the one that takes the most strength.

PTSD often carries a deep, buried fear of abandonment. So sometimes your spouse will *test* it — sometimes without even realizing they're doing it. They might push to the very edge. They might even say something like *"Maybe you should just leave"* or *"Do you want a divorce?"*

Every instinct will scream at you to either panic or fight back. Don't do either.

Instead, stay calm, and answer from your commitment. When my husband once asked me if I wanted a divorce, my answer was quiet and steady: *"If you want out, that's your choice. But I'm committed to this relationship. I'm not going anywhere."*

No panic. No begging. No argument. Just calm, grounded commitment.

That quiet steadiness is what makes them feel safe enough to stop testing — and safe enough to stay. You're answering the fear underneath the words, not the words themselves.

How to hold this in the hard moment:

- **Keep your voice low and steady.** Your calm is the medicine here.
- **Don't argue the content.** They're not really asking about divorce. They're asking *"will you leave me too?"*
- **Answer the real question.** *"I'm not going anywhere." "I'm committed, no matter what."*
- **Then let it rest.** Don't pile on. Say it, mean it, and give it room to land.

And here's the everyday version of this tool, not just the crisis version: **reassure your commitment regularly, before it's ever tested.** Little verbal anchors dropped into ordinary days — *"I'm glad I'm here with you." "We're in this together." "I'm not going anywhere."* Every one of those chips away at the abandonment fear so the big tests come less often.

> **A real talk moment:** holding the quiet commitment does *not* mean accepting mistreatment. There is a firm line between a spouse in pain who's testing whether you'll stay, and a spouse who is harming you. We're going to draw that line clearly in a few pages, because it's one of the most important things in this entire guide.

Staying Strong for Both of You

Here's something nobody tells the spouse: **you cannot pour from an empty cup.** All of these tools take strength, patience, and calm. And you can't give calm you don't have.

So this pillar is about you. Not as an afterthought — as a requirement. Taking care of yourself isn't selfish here. It's what makes you *able* to keep showing up.

The guilt you might feel — *"How can I focus on myself when they're the one suffering?"* — I understand it completely. But think of it this way: the steadier and more resourced you are, the safer you become for them. Caring for yourself *is* caring for the marriage.

Protecting your own well

You don't need hours you don't have. You need small, consistent refills:

- **Have one person you can be honest with.** Not to complain about your spouse, but to not carry this alone. A trusted friend, a support group, a therapist. The loneliness eases the moment even one person truly *gets it*.
- **Keep one thing that's just yours.** A walk, a show, a hobby, a quiet cup of coffee before the house wakes up. Something that reminds you you're still *you*, not only a caregiver.

- **Let yourself feel your own feelings.** You're allowed to be tired. You're allowed to grieve the marriage you thought you'd have while you build the one you actually can. Feeling it is how you keep it from leaking out sideways.
 - **Watch for your own limits.** Patience is a strength, but running yourself into the ground helps no one. Rest is part of the work.
- › **Reassurance for the road:** you're going to have moments where you get it wrong — where you snap back, or take something personally, or run out of patience. That doesn't mean you've failed. It means you're human doing something genuinely hard. When it happens, forgive yourself the same way you're learning to forgive your spouse's hard moments. Then begin again. Beginning again *is* the skill.
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Knowing the Difference: PTSD vs. Abuse

I need to be completely honest with you now, because this is the most important section in this entire guide, and I will not soften it.

Everything I've taught you is for a marriage that is **hard but safe** — a spouse in pain who is not harming you, in a relationship where you both want it to work.

Everything changes if you are being abused.

There is a clear and critical difference between PTSD behaviors and abuse, and you deserve to know exactly where that line is.

PTSD behaviors are things like withdrawing, going silent, needing space, being irritable, shutting down. They are about the sufferer's own pain and survival. They are not aimed at controlling or harming you.

Abuse is different. Abuse is about power and control over you. It is not the same as PTSD, and PTSD is never an excuse for it.

Use this to think it through honestly:

Is This PTSD, or Has a Line Been Crossed?

What are you experiencing?

- |— Withdrawal, silence, needing space?
 - |— Likely PTSD → The tools in this guide apply
- |— Irritability or snapping, then remorse?
 - |— Likely PTSD → Stay calm, use the tools
- |— Any of the following?
 - |— Physical harm or threats of harm → This is abuse
 - |— Controlling movements or who you see → This is abuse
 - |— Making you afraid in your own home → This is abuse
 - |— Isolating you from support → This is abuse
 - |— Any of these present → Your safety comes first,
seek professional help now

If anything on the right side of that flowchart is happening, please hear me: **do not stay and try harder.** This guide is not for that situation. Reach out to a domestic violence hotline, a counselor, or someone you trust, and get to safety. Loving someone does not mean absorbing harm. Commitment does not mean endangering yourself.

Staying and doing the work is only the right path when the relationship is *safe*. I'd rather lose your trust by saying this plainly than have you stay somewhere you shouldn't. Your safety is not negotiable — not to me, and not to anyone.

› **The disclaimers again, because they matter:** I'm sharing personal experience, not professional advice. This guide is not a substitute for professional PTSD treatment or therapy for either of you. If you're struggling, please involve a qualified professional. They're not a sign you've failed — they're reinforcements, and everyone doing this deserves them.

Your First Week With the Blueprint

Let's turn all of this into something you can actually *do*, starting today. You don't need to use everything at once. Small steps build real momentum.

Day 1 — Understand. Read "What's Really Happening" one more time. Put the decoder table somewhere you'll see it. Your only job today is to start reading the behavior differently. That's it.

Day 2 — Reassure. Drop one small verbal anchor into an ordinary moment. *"I'm glad I'm here with you."* Nothing more. Notice how it feels to offer it.

Day 3 — The Door-Opening Question. The next time you feel a wall go up, ask, gently: *"Are you mad at me?"* Accept whatever answer comes. You've opened the door — that's the win.

Day 4 — Safe Touch. Offer one moment of soft, non-demanding physical presence. A hand on the shoulder. Sitting close. No expectation of anything back.

Day 5 — Introduce Anniversary Days. On a calm moment, gently float the idea of a shared signal. Let your spouse help name it, or plant the language yourself if they're not ready.

Day 6 — Fill your own cup. Do one thing that's just for you. Reach out to your one honest person. You're part of this equation too.

Day 7 — Reflect and notice. Look back over the week and notice the moments. This is where it comes together.

Use this to catch the moments you might otherwise miss — because when you're exhausted, real progress can slip by unnoticed. Each evening, jot a quick note about any moment of openness or connection, however small.

My Week of Connection

Day	Tool I used today	A moment of openness/connection I noticed
Day 1		
Day 2		
Day 3		
Day 4		
Day 5		
Day 6		
Day 7		

Each evening, write down one tool you used and any moment — even a tiny one — where your spouse softened, opened up, or let you in. A one-word answer that felt a little warmer. A shoulder that didn't tense under your hand. A "no, it's not you." These count. These are the cracks of light.

By the end of this week, look back at that right-hand column. I believe you'll see at least one moment there that you might have missed entirely if you weren't watching for it. That moment is proof the door isn't locked. It's the beginning of everything.

When It Feels Hard: Your Questions, Answered

"What if I try everything and nothing happens the first few days?"

Completely normal. You're softening a wall that took a long time to build. The tools work by accumulating safety, and safety builds quietly before it shows. Keep going and keep watching for the small stuff — that's where it starts.

"What if I mess up and react badly in a hard moment?"

You will, sometimes. So did I. It doesn't undo your progress. Take a breath, forgive yourself, and begin again. Your consistency over time matters far more than any single moment.

"What if my spouse doesn't want to talk about any of this?"

You don't need their participation to start. Every one of these tools — the reframing, the safe touch, the quiet commitment, the reassurance — works whether or not they're on board yet. You lead by creating safety, and safety invites them in over time.

"Isn't focusing on myself selfish right now?"

No. It's what keeps you able to show up. A steadier you is a safer you for them. Filling your own cup is part of the work, not a break from it.

"How do I know if I'm making real progress?"

Look for the small shifts: slightly warmer responses, a little less tension when you're near, moments of honesty that weren't there before, the abandonment tests coming less often. Progress in this world is measured in cracks of light, not floodgates. Notice them, and let them encourage you.

You Were Never as Powerless as You Felt

Here's what I most want you to carry with you.

When you started reading this, you may have felt like the loneliest person in the world — loving someone you couldn't reach, blaming yourself for a wall you didn't build. That's not who you are anymore. You now understand what's actually happening. You have real tools. You know how to create safety, how to open doors, how to hold your commitment steady, and how to protect yourself if the line ever gets crossed.

You've gone from *confused and helpless* to *steady and equipped*. That's not a small thing. That's the whole thing.

The pushing-away was never the truth of your marriage. It was pain wearing a mask. And now you know how to see past the mask to the person who still loves you underneath it — and how to reach them, gently, one safe moment at a time.

A hard marriage does not have to have a scary ending. With understanding and the right tools, it can become something stronger than it ever was before mine did. Yours can too.

You already had the love and the commitment. Now you have the Blueprint. Start with Day 1. Watch for the light.

I'm rooting for you — more than you know.