

The Connection Cues™

The Exact Words to Say When Your Heart Is Pounding and Your Mind Goes Blank

A companion to The PTSD Marriage Blueprint™

A Quick Note Before We Start

Let me guess how it usually goes.

You read The PTSD Marriage Blueprint™. You understood — really understood — that when your spouse pulls away, goes quiet, or says something that cuts right through you, it isn't about you. You know they still love you, even in the moments they're pushing you hardest. You nodded along. It made sense. You felt something shift.

And then the hard moment actually arrived.

Maybe your spouse went cold and silent at dinner. Maybe they snapped at something small — something so small it almost made it worse. Or maybe — and this is the one that knocks the wind clean out of you — they said something like “*maybe you should just leave.*” And in that exact second, every clear, steady thing you'd learned just... evaporated. Your chest tightened. Your throat went dry. And instead of the calm response you meant to give, you froze. Or said the thing you swore you wouldn't say.

If that's you, I want you to hear this clearly: **there is nothing wrong with you.**

Knowing what to do and being able to do it while your own heart is breaking — those are two completely different skills. The Blueprint gave you the first one. This guide gives you the second.

That's the whole job of **The Connection Cues™** — to hand you the exact words and the exact next move *before* the hard moment hits, so you're not searching for them in the middle of the storm. Think of it like the difference between knowing how to swim and having a rope already in your hand when the water gets rough. One is knowledge. The other is something you can actually hold onto.

We're not going to re-teach the Blueprint here. You already understand *why* these tools work. This is about making them so ready, so close to the surface, that they come out of your mouth almost on their own — before the panic does.

Let's get you equipped.

› **Quick housekeeping (the important kind):** Everything in this guide comes from lived experience, not from a therapist's office. It is not medical advice, and it is not a replacement for professional PTSD treatment for your spouse or professional support for you. And the line we drew in the Blueprint still holds firmly here: these tools are for a hard-but-*safe* marriage. If you are being abused — physically, emotionally, or otherwise — no script applies. Your safety comes first. Full stop. We'll come back to this near the end, because it matters that much.

What The Connection Cues™ Actually Is

Here's the simple truth behind how this whole thing works.

When you're calm, your thinking brain is in charge. It can weigh words, remember what you've learned, choose the response that comes from love instead of fear. But the moment things go sideways — the cold silence at dinner, the cutting remark, the “*maybe you should just leave*” — a different part of your brain takes over. The part that only knows fight, freeze, or flee. And in that split second, your best thinking just... goes. Temporarily off the floor. Unavailable.

That's not weakness. That's biology. But it does mean that trying to *compose* the perfect calm sentence while your chest is tight and your hands are shaking is asking too much of yourself.

The Connection Cues™ does your thinking *ahead of time*.

Instead of searching for the right words in the middle of the storm, you'll already have them. Steady, ready, and waiting. You just reach for them.

The system has four parts, and we'll walk through each one:

1. **The Phrase Banks** — a collection of short, ready-made things to say for the most common hard moments, so you never have to invent words from scratch.
2. **The Hardest-Moment Scripts** — word-for-word responses for the specific situations that tend to break us (like the divorce threat), where getting it wrong hurts the most.

3. **The "Which Tool, Right Now?" Guide** — a fast way to decide, in the moment, which Blueprint tool fits what's actually happening in front of you.

4. **The Pocket Cue Card** — a single, glanceable summary you can copy onto a card or into your phone's notes, so your calm is always within arm's reach.

None of this asks you to memorize a speech. None of it asks you to become someone you're not. The phrases are plain, short, and gentle on purpose — because gentle is what signals safety to a nervous system that's already on high alert. Fancy words don't reach a person in distress. Simple, warm, steady ones do. Not because simple is all you have to offer. Because simple is what actually lands.

And here's something I want you to hold onto as you go through this: these cues belong to *you*. Throughout this guide, I'll give you fill-in lines so you can adjust the wording until it sounds like your voice, not a script someone handed you. Your spouse knows exactly how you talk, how you pause, how your warmth sounds. The words should still feel like they're coming from the person who loves them — just a calmer, more prepared version of you.

That version already exists. We're just helping them show up when it counts.

Part One: The Phrase Banks

Think of a phrase bank like a jar of ready-made responses. When a hard moment hits, you don't cook from scratch — you reach in and grab something that's already good to go.

I've organized these by the kind of moment you're in. You don't need all of them. Pick two or three from each group that feel natural in your mouth, and let those become your go-to lines. The more you use the same few phrases, the more automatic they become — and automatic is exactly what you need when your heart is pounding and your thinking brain has gone quiet.

When they've gone quiet and distant

This is the wall. They're right there — physically in the room — and somehow completely unreachable. And the guessing game starts up almost immediately. *Did I do something? Are they mad at me? Is this my fault?*

Your job here isn't to break the wall down. It's to gently knock, and let them know you're on the other side. Still there. Not going anywhere.

- "Hey. I'm not upset with you. I'm just here if you want me."
- "You don't have to talk. I just wanted you to know I'm close by."
- "Are you mad at me, or is this just a hard day?" (*the door-opening question from the Blueprint — keep it soft, no edge in your voice*)
- "No pressure at all. I'll be in the other room whenever you're ready."
- "I love you. That's it. Nothing you have to do with that."

Here's what every one of these phrases has in common: they remove pressure while keeping the door open. Not one of them asks your spouse to fix anything, explain anything, or perform anything. That's the point. When someone is overwhelmed, the kindest thing you can offer is a request-free presence. Not a question that needs answering. Not a feeling that needs tending. Just *I'm here, and there's nothing you owe me right now.*

When you need to reassure your commitment

Deep underneath so much PTSD behavior is a quiet, constant terror: *everyone leaves eventually*. It doesn't matter how much evidence exists to the contrary — the nervous system that's been through trauma has learned not to trust it. So the fear stays.

Regular, low-key reminders that you're staying can slowly begin to dissolve that fear. Not in one big conversation. In a hundred small moments.

The trick is to say it *without* making it a heavy moment. Drop it lightly, like it's just a plain fact of life. Because it is.

- "I'm not going anywhere. You know that, right?"
- "Rough day or good day, I'm still here."
- "You're stuck with me." (*a little lightness can land beautifully when the mood allows*)
- "I chose you, and I'd choose you again today."
- "Whatever this is, we're on the same team."

A gentle note on timing: reassurance works best when it's *unprompted* and woven into ordinary moments — handing them coffee, passing each other in the hallway, sitting next to them on the couch. Not saved up for emergencies. When reassurance only shows up during crises, it starts to feel like a warning light flashing. When it shows up on a random Tuesday, it becomes background safety. That's what you're building toward — a steady, quiet hum of *you are loved and I am staying* that doesn't require a reason.

When words aren't landing at all

Sometimes there are no words that will get through. And trying more words just adds noise to a system that's already overwhelmed.

This is where soft, non-demanding physical presence does what talking can't. A hand resting lightly on the shoulder. Sitting close without saying anything. A slow, unhurried hug that asks for nothing back.

Since touch isn't a phrase, here are the small permission lines that make touch feel safe rather than intrusive:

- "Can I sit with you?"
- "Is it okay if I hold your hand?"
- "I'm going to put my hand on your back — tell me if you'd rather I didn't."

The magic is in the *softness* and the *offer*. You're not grabbing, fixing, or pulling them toward you. You're offering a quiet anchor — and letting them choose whether to take it. If they flinch or pull back, that's information, not rejection. You simply say "okay" and stay near. The offer itself already said *I'm here*. That doesn't get unsaid.

Fill-in space: make them yours

Take a moment right now, while you're calm and quiet, and write your personal go-to lines. Future-you — standing in the middle of a hard moment, chest tight, searching for words — will be so grateful these are already chosen.

My Go-To Phrases

My "I'm here, no pressure" line: _____

My "I'm not going anywhere" line: _____

My "can I touch you softly" line: _____

The one phrase that feels most like ME: _____

Write your lines in your own voice, then say them out loud a few times before you ever need them. Familiar words are calmer words. And calmer words are the ones that actually reach someone.

Part Two: The Hardest-Moment Scripts

Some moments call for more than a phrase from the jar. These are the ones where the stakes feel enormous — where a fumbled response can echo for days afterward. For these moments, I want you to have something closer to a full script. Not to recite word for word. But to lean on when your own words go somewhere you can't find them.

The divorce threat ("maybe you should just leave")

This is the big one. The sentence that can drop you to your knees the moment you hear it.

Here's what makes it so cruel: very often, it isn't a real desire to end the marriage at all. It's the abandonment fear turning itself inside out — *"I'll push you away before you can leave me, so at least I see it coming."* It's a test. And when you understand that, your job in that moment becomes clear. You're not answering a question about divorce. You're answering the fear underneath it.

The worst responses are panic (*"How can you say that?!"*), bargaining (*"What did I do wrong, tell me and I'll fix it"*), or matching their heat (*"Fine, maybe I will!"*). All three confirm exactly what the fear was predicting — that love is fragile, conditional, and waiting to collapse.

What works is what I'd call the quiet commitment. Calm. Steady. No drama. Something like:

> *"If you truly want me to go, I'll respect that. But I want you to hear me clearly: I'm not leaving. I'm committed to this, to us. And even when you push me away, I know you still love me. I'm staying."*

Let me break down why each piece matters:

- *"If you truly want me to go, I'll respect that"* — this removes the trap. You're not clinging or controlling. And paradoxically, that makes it safe for them to stop pushing.
- *"I'm not leaving... I'm committed"* — the steady anchor. Said calmly, not desperately. There's a world of difference between those two deliveries.
- *"even when you push me away, I know you still love me"* — this names the real thing happening, gently, without accusation. You're seeing through the behavior to the person.
- *"I'm staying"* — two words. Total finality. Zero panic.

Then — and this is important — you stop talking. You don't fill the silence. You let those words sit in the room. The calm in your voice will say even more than the words themselves.

Make it yours:

My Quiet-Commitment Script

My calm opening ("if you truly want me to go..."):

My anchor line ("I'm committed to..."):

My closing two-to-three words ("I'm staying"):

Write these in your own voice now, and practice saying them slowly and quietly — the calm delivery matters as much as the words.

The sudden sharp snap over something small

A dish left out. A question asked at the wrong moment. A sound that shouldn't matter. And suddenly the reaction is enormous — so far out of proportion to whatever just happened that you're left standing there not even sure what hit you.

The instinct is to defend yourself (*"I only asked a simple question!"*) or snap right back. Both pour fuel on something that was never really about the dish to begin with.

Instead, try the de-escalating non-defense:

> *"You're right, let's leave it. I'm not looking for a fight. I'm on your side."*

Here's what you're doing: you're not admitting you were wrong about the dish. You're declining the fight entirely — and reasserting that you're an ally, not a threat. Because nine times out of ten, there was nothing real to fight about. The sharp edge was the PTSD talking. Not your spouse. Not the actual person who loves you.

The shutdown that lasts for days (the anniversary day)

In the Blueprint you learned about anniversary days — those hard stretches tied to dates, seasons, or memories, where your spouse goes under for a while. The world around them keeps moving, and they just... can't.

When you can name it together, the guessing game disappears. *Did I do something? Is this my fault?* Those questions stop spinning. The cue here is simple and gentle:

> *"Is this one of those hard stretches? You don't have to explain. I just want to know so I can be here the right way."*

And if they confirm it, your follow-up:

> *"Okay. I'm not going to crowd you. I'll be close, and I'll check in on you a little. That's all."*

This honors their need for space while making sure the space never turns into abandonment. You're withdrawing pressure, not presence. There's a real difference between those two things — and they'll feel it, even when they can't say so.

Part Three: The "Which Tool, Right Now?" Guide

Here's a problem the phrase banks alone don't solve: in the heat of a moment, how do you know *which* approach to reach for?

Silence and a snap and a divorce threat all need something different from you. And your overwhelmed brain — the one that's been running on stress for weeks — doesn't want to sort it out on the fly. It doesn't have the bandwidth. You need the path already worn in before the moment hits.

So I've done the sorting for you. Think of this as a quick mental flowchart — something you can run in about three seconds once it's familiar. Read it through a few times now, when everything is calm. The more you trace it in quiet moments, the more automatically you'll find it when it counts.

Which Connection Cue Do I Use Right Now?

What is my spouse doing in this moment?

- |— Gone quiet / withdrawn → Are they asking for space?
 - |— Yes → Give space + "I'm close if you want me"
 - |— No → Use door-opener: "Are you mad, or hard day?"
- |— Snapped / sharp over something small → Decline the fight
 - |— "You're right, let's leave it. I'm on your side."
- |— Said something that scares me ("just leave") →
 - |— Quiet commitment: calm, steady, "I'm staying"
- |— Silent for days (anniversary stretch) →
 - |— Name it gently + stay close, low-pressure
- |— I honestly can't read them → Default to soft presence
 - |— Gentle touch or sit near: "Can I sit with you?"

Trace the path that matches your moment, then reach for the matching phrase from Part One or Two. When in doubt, the bottom branch — soft presence — is almost never the wrong choice.

Notice that last branch. When you truly can't read what's happening, you don't need to diagnose it. You don't need to get it exactly right. You default to quiet, gentle presence — and an offer of touch if that feels safe.

Here's the thing: presence is the universal answer. It fits almost every hard moment. It buys you time to read the room. It communicates something words sometimes can't — *I'm here. I'm not going anywhere. You're not alone in this.*

If you remember nothing else under pressure, remember that. When you're unsure, get gentle. Get close.

That is almost never the wrong choice.

Part Four: The Pocket Cue Card

This is the piece that makes everything portable. The whole point of The Connection Cues™ is to have your calm within reach — and this card is how you carry it. Copy it onto an index card for your wallet, a sticky note on the bathroom mirror, or a note in your phone. Somewhere you can glance at it in ten seconds. Maybe stepping into the next room to breathe before you respond.

My Pocket Connection Cue Card

Their Signal	My First Move
Quiet & distant	"I'm not upset. I'm here if you want me."
Sharp / snappy	"You're right, let's leave it. I'm on your side."
"Maybe just leave"	"I'm not going anywhere. I'm staying."
Long hard stretch	"Is this a hard one? I'll be close, no pressure."
Can't tell	"Can I sit with you?" (soft presence)

Copy this onto a small card and keep it somewhere private but reachable; glance at it before responding whenever you feel your heart start to race.

That last line isn't decoration.

On the days you need this card most — the days when your chest is tight and your mind is spinning and none of this feels like it's working — you'll have forgotten the one truth that changes everything. So let the card remind you: the pushing away isn't the whole story. The love is still in there. You're reaching for the person, not the pain.

Part Five: Seeing the Cues in Action

Let me walk you through how this actually plays out — so it stops living in your head as a good idea and starts feeling like something real you can do.

These aren't stories about specific people. They're the situations you're most likely to face, shown the way you might move through them with the cues already loaded.

The cold shoulder at dinner. You're eating together and your spouse has gone somewhere far away inside themselves. Quiet. Unreachable. The old response — *"What's wrong? Did I do something? Just talk to me"* — only stacks more pressure on a moment that's already heavy. But with the cues in your hand, you land on "quiet and distant," and you say something simple: "Hey, I'm not upset with you at all. I'm just here if you want me." Then you go back to your meal. Unhurried. You've knocked gently and left the door open. No guessing game forced onto them, no demand dressed up as a question. That's a win — even if they stay quiet the whole meal.

The text that lands like a punch. You're at work. A message comes through: *"I don't know why you even stay. You should just go."* Your stomach drops. This is exactly the moment where freezing or firing back does the most damage. So you step away for thirty seconds. You find the quiet commitment. You write back — calm, short, steady: *"I'm not going anywhere. We'll talk tonight, and I'm still here."* You answered the fear, not the words. You didn't spiral. And you didn't leave them alone in their panic.

The snap you didn't see coming. You ask a completely ordinary question — "Did you call the plumber?" — and you get a sharp, disproportionate response. When you're tired, defending yourself feels like the only honest thing to do. But you run the three-second check, land on "snapped over something small," and say: "You're right, let's leave it — I'm on your side." The argument has nowhere to go. Ten minutes later, the air has shifted. Often, once the storm passes, you'll get a quiet "sorry." You protected the connection instead of the point.

Here's what I want you to notice across all three. In every one of those moments, the cue did the heavy lifting. You didn't have to invent calm from nothing. You didn't have to be superhuman. You just reached for what was already in your hand.

When It Doesn't Go Smoothly: Troubleshooting

Let me be honest with you about something — you're going to fumble. You'll reach for the wrong phrase, or say the right thing in completely the wrong tone, or forget everything and react exactly the way you used to. That's not failure. That's being human under real, relentless pressure. Here's how to handle the bumps when they come.

"I said the words but they didn't work." First, gently reframe what "work" even means here. A cue succeeds when *you* stayed steady and kept the door open — not when your spouse instantly softens. Some moments, they'll stay deep in their fog no matter what you say. And that's not on you. You planted safety. Sometimes the seed sprouts later, quietly, when you're not even in the room. Keep showing up.

"I froze anyway and forgot everything." Then you begin again — and that is completely allowed. You can even circle back afterward: *"Earlier was hard and I didn't handle it the way I wanted to. I love you, and I'm still here."* A repair after the fact is almost as powerful as getting it right in the moment. Sometimes more, because it shows them you keep choosing them even after a stumble.

"The words feel fake coming out of my mouth." That usually means you skipped the make-it-yours step. Go back to the fill-in lines. Rewrite them until they actually sound like you. And know this: a little awkwardness at the beginning is completely normal — the first few times will feel stiff, like wearing new shoes. Say them anyway. Comfort comes with repetition.

"My spouse noticed I'm 'using techniques' on them." This one worries a lot of people. Here's the reframe: you're not manipulating anyone. You're being a more prepared version of the person who already loves them. If it ever comes up, honesty disarms it completely. *"Yeah, I've been trying to get better at being here for you when things get hard. I love you and I didn't want to keep getting it wrong."* That's not a trick. That's devotion with a little planning behind it.

"I did everything right and they still pulled away." Some stretches are just heavy, and no cue will shortcut them. Your job isn't to fix your spouse's PTSD — you can't, and it was never yours to carry. Not because you aren't enough. Because it's not yours to carry. Your job is to be a steady, safe presence they can find their way back to. Give the space. Keep the door unlocked. Take care of yourself in the meantime. And trust the long game.

One More Time, Because It Matters: The Safety Line

I won't re-teach what the Blueprint already covered. But I will say it again plainly, because I'd never forgive myself if I let this be the last page without saying it one more time.

These cues are for a hard marriage. Not a dangerous one.

There is a real and important difference between a spouse who withdraws, shuts down, or lashes out because PTSD has their nervous system in survival mode — and a spouse who is genuinely abusive. Controlling you. Frightening you. Hurting you. Making you feel unsafe in your own home.

No script in this guide applies to abuse. Not one.

If that line has been crossed, the wise move — the strong move — is not a better phrase. It's protecting yourself and reaching out for real help. Staying and working at it is only the right path when the relationship is fundamentally safe. Your wellbeing is not the price of admission to this marriage. Read that again.

And once more, gently: everything here is my lived experience, shared spouse-to-spouse. It is not therapy. Not medical advice. Not a substitute for professional PTSD treatment. The best outcomes I've seen and heard about pair steady connection at home *with* real professional support — because you don't have to be the whole solution. You were never meant to be.

You just have to be the safe, steady presence.

And now you've got the words to do it.

Your First Step (Do This Today)

Let's not let this stay in the realm of good intentions. Here's exactly where to start — and it takes about ten minutes:

1. Fill in your phrase banks and scripts. Go back through the fill-in spaces and write your lines in your own voice. Don't aim for perfect — aim for *sounds like you*.

2. **Make your Pocket Cue Card.** Copy it onto something you'll actually have with you. Wallet, phone, bathroom mirror — wherever your eyes will land when a tense moment is already happening.

3. **Say your top three lines out loud.** Yes, out loud, even if it feels a little silly. We've all muttered to ourselves in the kitchen — this is just a better use of it. Hearing your own calm voice say the words makes them *reachable* later, when your heart is pounding and your brain wants to go blank.

4. **Pick your default.** Memorize the bottom branch of the decision guide: *when unsure, get gentle and get close*. That single habit will carry you through more hard moments than anything else in this guide.

That's it. Four things. Ten minutes.

You don't need to wait for the next hard moment to prepare for it. Do this now, while things are calm. Because the next time the wall goes up and your mind starts spinning — you'll reach into your pocket, or into your memory, and find your calm already waiting there.

Here's what I most want you to carry: **you've always had the love. Now you've got the words to match it.**

The door isn't locked. And now you know exactly what to say when you knock.

You've got this.