

I would like to try to explain why your guys act the way they do; from a woman and veteran's point of view. I know it is very frustrating for you but it is equally as or more so for your veteran, which does not "excuse" the behavior but can shed some light on WHY. However, if there is any physical violence, please get out and have your vet seek help for this before going back, do NOT risk your life as well, his or hers has already been taken, don't allow yourself to be a casualty of war as well.

First the clinical reasons (shortened version):
PTSD LITERALLY CHANGES THE BRAIN

PTSD changes in the activity of the amygdala, the area of the brain involved in emotional memory are due to actually damage to the amygdala by being in a heightened sense of awareness and danger for an extended period of time, that time may only be a few minutes. This helps to explain the sustained hyper-awareness that those with PTSD experience. MRI scans have also shown damage to the hippocampus of sufferers, which plays a major role in short-term memory and emotions. There is also increased blood flow in the prefrontal cortex, the region responsible for decision-making - hyperactivity here is thought to be involved in the excessive reaction to fear. This is another cause of the sustained hyper-awareness, jumpiness, and irrational thought processes. Most strikingly, there was a loss of up to 10 per cent of the grey matter - the nerve cells and blood vessels that make up much of the brain in those with PTSD.

Second the emotional or "programmed" reasons (I will use a few examples from various posts):

"Yeah, guys with PTSD can be very manipulative and especially if they have been successful in career or social network by being "charming"."
In the military, you have to be very good at what you do in order to succeed, move up in rank, etc. If you reach the point of supervisor, which can be done in as little as 2 years, you have a tremendous amount of responsibility as you are now responsible for many others not just yourself. These others very lives depend on the decisions you make, sometimes these are split second decisions. When you have been in that capacity for a long period of time, you "become" that individual and it does not go away easily and may never go away completely, no matter how hard you try; this in itself can be extremely frustrating. Combine this with the problems of PTSD and you get a small picture of what the vet is going through and may understand it better than he/she does. Suddenly being out of control of your own actions when you were once a well-programmed individual is NOT an easy task in the least, but you can learn to cope, eventually.

“... told me frankly that "PTSD has ruined all my relationships".”

The vet does realize that he is not the same and never will be again, that is very frustrating, especially for someone who has been a “career” man. Their lives and futures are literally turned upside down, and that is utterly scary. Combine that with the fact that he/she is a soldier, airman, marine, etc and suppose to be the protector, not getting scared, being brave at all times and you have an emotional disaster.

“I don't think he realized the implications (nor did I) of PTSD and the impact it would have on our relationship.”

He/she doesn't realize the impact this will have on their own lives much less that of someone else's. Combine this with the fact that they are constantly worried about how their PTSD is affecting their loved ones can make matters much worse.

“Everything was his way. He took all emotional and mental support that I could give, but when I needed him it was little or nothing (sometimes he would just disappear - out of contact with me and his family too).”

The vet literally just doesn't know how to act anymore. He/she thinks, and is often right, that getting away from the loved one is better for that loved one and it is better than physically or emotionally hurting that person even when you try not to. This is why so many marriages and relationships split up if one of the persons in that relationship has PTSD, and neither is to blame.

“It does seem "all about" the PTSD person, because they are trying to cope and deal with all the problems and issues. I guess that gives one tunnel vision, and you don't pay attention to your partner's needs. They just don't see it.”

They DO see it, they just don't know what to do anymore. They have no control over their own life, their emotions, their thoughts, etc and if they can't help themselves they certainly can't help anyone else. They can learn to help themselves though and in turn learn to help their mate.

“From being in groups and talking to men and women, I know that counseling and vet counseling groups can help - but you really have to find the right counselor and a good group for the combat vet.”

This is very true, not all counselors are alike, and not all counselors are compatible with the vet. Most women vets, like me, prefer a woman counselor because they understand the woman's perspective of things. We are already emotional creatures, combine this with PTSD and you have a real mess!

Most male vets on the other hand prefer a male counselor, as he would understand them better.

“Let him know that you love and want to support him, but draw the line when behavior is not acceptable. Leave the room or house if necessary. Let him have his space. Tell him what you need from him, but also have your own life and interests to keep you busy.” This is very true. I cannot stress enough how important it is NOT to stay in an abusive environment! Do let your vet know, often, that you love them and are there for them even if you don't always understand them, because they don't understand themselves anymore either. Do let them know what you need and have your own interests, as the vet just doesn't have any anymore, so you can have a release.

“I never thought of questioning why military buddies have a Closeness.” This one is very obvious to the vet who relied on these buddies for his life and vice versa. It is a literal “brotherhood” as you become even closer than family and are family.

There a lot more I could say and may later on, but the key is to get your vet the help he/she needs, be patient, love him even when you don't “like” him, have a support group of your own (like this one), so as much research as you can, be tougher than he is, and DON'T take any crap!

You might also want to find out more about secondary PTSD, which most family members end up with themselves and don't know it.

I hope this has helped at least one person understand their vet and even themselves a little more.

Blessings,
Tanya