



Conscious communication / Positive change

Guide to a Healthy Separation

Separations can be as constructive as the individuals are willing to make it; however it takes work, planning and dedication to stick to the plan, even when emotions of fear and doubt get in the way. Children worry about where they will be, how they will miss each of you and how Mommy and Daddy will live when they are not with them. Even if they appear to be doing OK, when you least expect it, you may be surprised at what they are really feeling. For their sake and yours, it is up to you to take the time you need to plan and negotiate. There is no time limit on an agreement and should be treated with respect and care so that when you sign it, you feel comfortable and convinced you have done the right thing for yourselves and your children.

There are several issues to consider while processing your separation. Please refer to the following list as a starter point.

1. **Decide on the goals of the separation.** Remember that separation can be a move on its own or a prelude towards a more permanent divorce. You can always decide down the road which you are more comfortable with and later move to a more permanent solution, however, you should probably decide what the outcome you want to achieve.
2. **Decide on a reasonable time limit** for the separation
3. **It is suggested that couples work on a specific time frame** in order to keep yourselves from becoming overwhelmed, which is easy to do during this time. Pick a time of the year where there isn't a lot of other things going on so that you can focus your energizes, both mental and physically on the new arrangements you have to make.
4. **Decide who is going to move out.**
5. **Negotiate financial responsibilities** during the separation.
6. **Make a detailed budget.** Remember that 2 homes cost more than one. Define who is going to pay which bills, and who or how each one of you will pay for the children's needs.
7. **Decide who will have residential access** for the children for the purposes of school registration. Try not to move them from their current school if at all possible.
8. **Be specific about where the children will reside** during the school week, which days and time. Be specific about when the children will live with the non-residential parent, how you will spend holidays, vacations, birthdays, excess to grandparents and other extended family members.
9. **Decide how much you want and can afford to spend** with each other as co-parents.

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10. **Remember that separation may be something you believe will be in your best interest** when you first discuss it, but may turn out to be not what you expected. Talk about your beliefs. Meet for lunch or dinner once a week. Continue your marital therapy if you are currently in it. Don't spend nights together or have sex with each other. It confuses the children if there are any and it confuses your emotions. Sex release oxytocin, a feel good hormone, and it often tricks us into believing that everything is great now. Tomorrow will look very different once again.
11. **After everything is planned**, invite the children in to discuss coaching and a run through as to how things will be different. Discuss what they could and should expect.