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Innovative Approaches to Counseling and Change™



THE HEALING SEPARATION: **AGREEMENT FORM**

Adapted from *Rebuilding: When Your Relationship Ends* (2nd edition)
by Bruce Fisher, PhD

A healing separation is a very challenging experience, which may result in increased stress and anxiety for both partners. Some structure and awareness can help improve the chances of success of the healing separation. Unplanned and unstructured separations will most likely contribute to the ending of the relationship. This healing separation agreement attempts to provide structure and guidelines to help make the separation a more constructive and creative experience, and to greatly enhance the growth of the relationship rather than contributing to its demise.

For the sake of clarity throughout this Agreement Form, the following distinctions will be made:

Partner A refers to: _____

Partner B refers to: _____

A. Commitment to do a Healing Separation:

With the awareness that our love relationship is at a point of crisis, we choose to try a working and creative healing separation in order to obtain a better individual perspective of the future of our relationship. In choosing this healing separation, it is acknowledged there are aspects in our relationship that are destructive to us as a couple and as individuals. Likewise we acknowledge there are positive and constructive elements in our relationship which could be called assets and upon which we may be able to build a new and different relationship. With this in mind, we are committed to do the personal, social, psychological, and spiritual work necessary to make this separation a healing one.

We agree that at some future time, when we have experienced the personal growth, self-exploration, and differentiation possible in a healing separation, we will make a more enlightened decision about the future of our love relationship.

B. Goals of Our Healing Separation:

Each of us agrees to the following goals for this separation:

- To provide time and emotional space outside of the love relationship so I can enhance my personal, social, spiritual, and emotional growth.
- To better identify my needs, wants, and expectations of the love relationship.
- To help me explore what my basic relationship needs are and to help me determine if these needs can be met in this love relationship.

- To experience the social, sexual, economic, and/or parental stresses which can occur when I have separated from my partner.
- To allow me to determine if I can work through my process better apart than I can in the relationship.
- To experience enough emotional distance so I can separate out my issues, which have probably become convoluted and mixed up together with my partner's issues in our relationship.
- To provide an environment to help our relationship heal, transform, and evolve into a more loving and healthy relationship.
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

C. Specific Decisions Regarding this Healing Separation:

1. Length of Separation:

We agree our separation will begin on (month and day) _____ and end on (month and day) _____.

Most couples have a sense of how long the separation they will need or want should be. It may vary from a few weeks to six months or longer. The length of time agreed upon may be re-negotiated at any time by the initiation of either partner. The length of time would be good topic for a family meeting or a communication exercise.

2. Time to be Spent Together:

We agree to spend time together when it is agreeable to both parties. This time might be spent having fun, talking, parenting together, and/or sharing our individual personal growth processes. We agree to initially meet per the arrangements made for our family meetings and to re-negotiate the time together as needed. We agree to discuss and reach an agreement if this time together is to include a continuing sexual involvement with each other. More specifically, we agree to spend time together in the following ways:

A Healing Separation ideally should include some quality time together on a regular basis. Some people will enjoy their new-found freedom and desire very little quality time. On the other hand, when the person needing more emotional space separates, he or she may want more time together. This may be confusing to the person who didn't desire the Healing Separation. Partners who feel suffocated emotionally desperately want out. But when they get out of what feels like a tight place, the need for emotional space is decreased tremendously.

It is important that the time together be quality time and that it be spent creating a new relationship. When the old pattern starts occurring in whatever forms that may take, one solution is to end the quality time together and be apart. There are arguments for and against a continued sexual involvement with each other. Ideally sexual contact will enhance intimacy and make the separation less stressful and hurtful. Sex can, however, result in more problems, such as creating confusion for the potential person being left if the person leaving is just trying to "let me down easy."

3. Personal Growth Experiences:

Partner A agrees to participate in:

- individual counseling
- couple/marriage counseling
- other personal growth experiences (reading books, journaling, exercise program, growth group)
- other: _____

Partner B agrees to participate in:

- individual counseling
- couple/marriage counseling
- other personal growth experiences (reading books, journaling, exercise program, growth group)
- other: _____

4. Relationships and Involvements Outside of the Relationship:

Partner A agrees to:

- develop a support system of important friends
- become more involved socially with others
- remain emotionally monogamous
- remain sexually monogamous
- become involved in clubs, church singles groups, etc.
- other: _____

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Partner B agrees to:

- develop a support system of important friends
- become more involved socially with others
- remain emotionally monogamous
- remain sexually monogamous
- become involved in clubs, church singles groups, etc.
- other: _____

Ideally a joint decision and compromise should be made concerning social involvement, romantic, and sexual relationships outside of this relationship.

5. Living Arrangements:

Partner A agrees to:

- remain in the family home
- move and find an alternative living arrangement
- alternate living with partner so the children can remain in family home
- other: _____

Partner B agrees to:

- remain in the family home
- move and find an alternative living arrangement
- alternate living with partner so the children can remain in family home
- other: _____

In-house separation, with both parties continuing to live in the family home, frequently results in a less creative experience. It seems to dilute the separation experience and keeps both parties from experiencing as much personal growth as is possible with separate living arrangements. It may not give enough emotional space to the person who needs more space.

6. Financial Decisions:

Partner A agrees to:

- maintain joint checking account jointly
- maintain joint checking account separately
- open new checking account
- pay auto expenses
- pay household living expenses
- pay child support of \$_____ monthly
- pay home mortgage and utilities
- pay medical and dental bills
- other: _____

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Partner B agrees to:

- maintain joint checking account jointly
- maintain joint checking account separately
- open new checking account
- pay auto expenses
- pay household living expenses
- pay child support of \$ _____ monthly
- pay home mortgage and utilities
- pay medical and dental bills
- other: _____

Often in unplanned, unstructured separations, one person will completely close out checking accounts and savings accounts without the other person's knowledge or consent. If there is any chance for potential disagreement, each person should take out half of the assets and both can then open separate accounts.

D. Children Involved in this Relationship:

We agree to:

- joint custody
- solo or physical custody be given to: _____

We agree to the following or attached visitation schedule.

The medical and dental expenses and health insurance will be the responsibility of partner _____.

We agree to the following suggestions, designed to help the healing separation be a positive experience for our children:

1. Both parents remain committed to maintaining a good quality relationship with each child involved. Each child should continue to feel loved by both parents.
2. Parents should be as open and honest with the children about the Healing Separation as is appropriate.
3. The parents will help the children see and understand that the physical separation is an adult problem and that the children are not responsible for the problems in the parent's love relationship.
4. The parents will not express anger or negative feelings towards the other parent through the children. It is very destructive to children to become caught in the emotional crossfire of the parents.
5. The parent will avoid forcing the children to take sides in the parental arguments concerning differing attitudes and viewpoints.
6. The parent will not put the children in a position of spying and reporting on the behavior of the other parent

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7. Both parents will remain committed to working with each other on parenting the children and to effectively co-parent with as much cooperation as possible.

It is important when a couple does a Healing Separation to minimize the emotional trauma for the children involved.

E. Signing the Agreement:

We have read and discussed the above Healing Separation Agreement and agree to the above terms of the agreement. Each of us furthermore agrees to inform the other partner of any desire to modify or change any terms in the agreement, or to terminate the agreement.

Partner #A _____ Date _____

Partner #B _____ Date _____

Therapist _____ Date _____

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