

DUCKLOW'S

# A PLANFUL AND MEDIATED SEPARATION

AN ANSWER TO DOING NOTHING WHEN  
SOMETHING NEEDS TO BE DONE

“Divorce is a fire exit. When a house is burning, it doesn’t matter who set the fire. If there is no fire exit, everyone in the house will be burned!” — [Mehmet Murat ildan](#)

“Those who divorce aren't necessarily the most unhappy, just those neatly able to believe their misery is caused by one other person.” — [Alain de Botton](#)

I doubt that anyone wakes up one morning with the idea of ending a marriage, especially a marriage initiated in friendship, faith and hope for the future. But couples do "store up" their hurts and harms and this can come result in feeling like divorce is the only answer. When the couple is fused with hostility and when simple kindnesses, let alone contentment, has long passed, a "planful and mediated separation" might be an alternative to endurance.

If divorce is a tearing of home and heart, a structured and mediated separation is an opportunity to think and consider, plan and implement. It is non-reactive, considered and planful and for many, even prayerful. This sort of differentiation is considered the

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hallmark of wisdom in Family Systems and other theories and when the marriage has gone sideways for too long then this structure can be helpful.

Defining a mediated and planful separation: Neither a step northward towards divorce nor a step southward towards where it once was, this mediation is a step sideways for a defined period of time, for consideration and decision-making under the mentorship of someone who knows the terrain.

Objective: To think, plan, wonder and wander and to react less in hatred or to hide less in accommodation; rather to understand and appreciate the best that the marriage has offered and might offer in the future, and to address the ambivalence about the marriage from both partners' perspectives.

Contra-indications of planful and mediated separation: Where there is sexual or physical abuse of spouse or child, consequential drug or alcohol impairment, or desertion / criminal detention, or other factors where children or spouse are placed in significant jeopardy, a planful separation is not recommended. Individual or family therapy is the first recommended of challenge and change.

Factors that suggest a planful separation over doing nothing or quitting:

- When both partners agree to a planful separation as the best next step.
- This process allows for several months or weeks of mediation, thoughtfulness and discernment.
- When there are high levels of conflict, as in name-calling, threatening, withholding intimacy, physical / sexual harm, then separation is necessary.
- When one spouse shuts down and where the non-communication between spouses reinforces emotional cutoff.

- Where kids are triangulated and where parents, friends, in-laws and others are trapped in judging and / or rescuing.

Benefits possible from a planful separation:

- Relief of ongoing chaos and conflict that is hurtful and harmful. This can result in greater resiliency and hope.
- Reducing negative interactions between partners and potentially increasing the positive. This can increase trust and peace.
- Ability to acknowledge the other's "goodness" again while reducing the tendency to take the other for granted. This can result in new vision.
- Gaining experience in independence and self-differentiation. This can result in deciding a new future.
- Providing a time for decision-making without pressure or coercion.
- Acknowledgement of the marital and family stresses / problems and discernment about how to handle these in the future.
- To experience how divorce and separate living can be lived.

### **Principles of the Planful and Mediated Separation Agreement**

1. Identifying the objectives – what are we trying to accomplish by our planful separation?
2. Planful mediation: The contact with the therapist (conjoint sessions) is determined. A minimum of one time per month is recommended.

3. Duration of separation – A minimum of 6 weeks and a maximum of 6-8 months is recommended.
4. Financial considerations: Determining the shared financial obligations, definition of who pays for what and how the bills are to be distributed.
5. Contact and responsibilities with children: The essential part here is a common agreement of what the children are told and when they are told. I think it is normally best to tell them together.
6. Frequency of contact between partners: This has to do with face-to-face, written letters, texting, emailing and the like. What are the boundaries of shared life?
7. Marital sexual relationship: Partners reach a mutually agreed upon level of sexual contact during the separation time.
8. Frequency of relationships with non-family: This has to do with dating, people avoided, work relationships, church or other community relationships and how incidental contacts are to be handled.
9. Ethics, privacy and issues of trust: Both agree to not harm the viability of the marriage and family (as in how the couple speaks of each other, how other relationships are conducted, etc.).
10. Specifics that I recommend:
  - 6-month separation in separate domiciles with the primary parent occupying the family residency.
  - No other dating relationships no matter how superficial.
  - Monthly face-to-face conjoint sessions (60-90 minutes).

- No other texting, emailing, or other “non-essential” digital or telephone communication throughout the week.
- No triangulating between children and parents, or between couple and in-laws, church, friends, etc. This is a topic for counselling.
- Each partner journal and bring the journals to the counselling sessions.
- Weekly social meeting (if tolerable) – e.g. at Starbucks or for a walk to discuss “upward and outward” (to be determined in counselling).
- Weekly family dinners (if tolerable) – e.g. Sunday evening to talk about “social geography” (that is, what people are doing in the week to come).
- Block booking of shared time (to be determined in counselling) and responsibilities for children and other responsibilities.

### **Conclusions and Summary**

That you are reading this document and that you are considering the consequences of your marriage and its stability over time, I recommend that you contact a Psychologist or Marriage and Family Therapist. You might also wish to connect with a Lawyer or legal advocate who will have insight for you about the particulars of a planful separation. My work is in the Lower Mainland of Vancouver, BC and if you wish to contact me re resources in your city, please email me as the address below.