



Therapeutic Separation

A Therapeutic Model developed by Phillip Bass of Trinitas Services

Overview. At all times it is important to assess the health of a relationship. Exploring the Nurture, Play, and Structure (NPS) balance within a relationship is one way this can be done. Healthy relationships require a balance of Nurture, Play, and Structure to thrive. Unfortunately, in some instances it can be difficult to assess the health of a relationship without stepping outside of normal patterns of relational behavior. In these times, assessing the health of a relationship is best done with the assistance of a professional clinician. If it is determined that remaining in a relationship and/or physical setting is no longer conducive to the health of a relationship, a clinician may recommend a Therapeutic Separation.

What is a Therapeutic Separation?

Much like a legal separation, a therapeutic separation is an intentional division of a relationship. This may include housing, finances, child/elder care, etc. Unlike a legal separation, a therapeutic separation is not designed to lead to divorce, although this may be the eventual outcome. Instead, it is designed for individuals to assess what path forward would bring about the healthiest outcome for each person and for the overall relationship.

What are some guidelines for a Therapeutic Separation?

- Generally, therapeutic separations are designed to last 6–8 weeks.
 - If living together, one person may be asked to secure different housing for the assessment.
 - The idea is to gradually and intentionally bring partners back together through a series of exercises, therapeutic sessions, and Play.
- Decisions regarding communication, childcare, etc., are decided within the therapeutic setting and with the guidance of a professional clinician.
 - Most therapeutic separations begin with a 2-week period of no communication between the individuals who are separating.
 - It is encouraged that the initial contact after the 2-week period takes place in a therapeutic setting and with the guidance of a professional clinician.
- During the therapeutic separation period, individuals will meet regularly with a professional clinician.
 - Individuals will report and process their experiences of time apart.
 - Individuals will decide if they would like less or greater time apart, as well as less or greater communication.
 - The clinician will ask questions to help individuals assess what they have discovered about themselves and their relationship between sessions.

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Questions to Explore Prior to Initiating

1. What is the current NPS balance in my relationship?

- Where do I receive Nurture?
- Am I providing Nurture?
- Does my relationship include Play?
- Do we play together, apart, or about the same?
- What does the Structure of my relationship look like?
- Do I feel a stronger sense of obligation or choice in my relationship?

2. What would I need in a therapeutic separation?

- How long would I like to go without communication to or from my current partner(s)?
- What Structure do we need in place while apart?
 - How will bills be paid?
 - Do we have a spending limit?
 - How will childcare / eldercare / petcare be handled?
 - What are understandable reasons to communicate outside of the agreement?
 - Will we tell anyone? If so, who and why?

Remember. Your NPS-trained professional clinician will help you walk through these and other questions as you prepare for a potential therapeutic separation. It is important that all parties be in agreement about the boundaries of any therapeutic separation prior to it beginning. Remember, the goal of a therapeutic separation is to find a healthy path forward!

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