



# Dealing with Separation Mindfully

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**CREATIVE Transformations**

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## Am I going mad?

It is said that separation is just as stressful for us as is a death in the family. Be good to yourself, don't judge or feel guilty about not being at your most charming!

Something is ending so the feelings range from shock, denial, anger, fear, grief, frustration, confusion, stress and loss of control.

The next stage is the ambiguity stage full of: discomfort, anxiety, a mix of high/low motivation, impatience, short fuse and general discomfort.

Things then start to ease up, the light at the end of the tunnel bringing with it: creativity, a sense of control, risk taking, motivating others, managing stress, planning, sense of purpose and vision.

There is no rule of thumb as to how long this takes, it depends on the circumstances of the breakup, our own interpretation of it, our natural coping skills, level of support and various individual factors.

Consider what your grief or emotion is about:

- The loss of a partner?
- Upset about the break up of the family, for you? For the children?
- Is it about disappointing extended family?
- Is it about letting go of an idea that we would be the happy family?
- Is it about what you think separating says about you?
- Missing children?
- Change of financial circumstances?
- Loss of friends and change of friends
- Loneliness?
- Your world picture being challenged or destroyed?
- Is it being humiliated?
- Is it about guilt?
- Other reasons?

We recommend that you seek counselling if you feel depressed or unable to control your emotions or thoughts. Think of it this way, if the TV no longer works, you don't just sit there looking at it hoping that one day it will start working, - you call a TV repair man. Same thing for emotional challenges, seek professional help, counselling or coaching.

### ***Emotion = arousal + interpretation***

Remember that how you feel is a function of the situation and your interpretation of the situation, is there room for you to change some interpretations?



## Conflict running off track – who is this other person?

Have a look at this and consider if you are unable to see the other party as anything but bad, malicious and devious. If that is the case you need to work on stepping down this conflict ladder! Emotions wear the pants and so if you believe that the other party is bad, you will only see that, perceptions create reality. Be aware of the warning signs and force yourself to explore and entertain other possible reasons for their behaviour rather than them just being bad. Consider what you used to like in the person, consciously look for that again. Engage friends in supporting you in being a wiser person.

### **Polarisation**

No longer able to be in the same place. Time of rupture, divorce, dismissal, resignation, escape and ghetto formation.

### **Open hostility**

Now we are hardened, the other side is the enemy. If in a group we stand together while weeding out traitors. We become extremist, the end justifies the means. We are the good guys, the other side is bad. Them vs Us.

### **Magnifying the enemy**

We no longer see the other side with nuances and clarity, only their negative sides. We observe in the other side the characteristics we despise in ourselves. The original problem faces out, aim is instead to be right, and to win against the other party. The conflict is a magnet to us, taking up most of our thinking and focus, and draining our energy.

### **Dialogue is given up**

Negative feelings cloud reasoning, we communicate without precision, we repeat ourselves and don't listen. Dialogue of the deaf! We don't talk to each other but about each other. We leave behind language and communicate with hostile action.

### **The Problem Expands**

We recall other flaws and mistakes of the other side. Old unsettled conflicts and injustices reappear.

### **Personification**

Negative feelings enter the scene. The actual problem is no longer the focus. The other side is. We reproach, attack, defend ourselves, feel hurt, misunderstand the other party and distort. We distrust the other sides' motives and character. It starts to become unpleasant.

### **A discrepancy**

We simply do not agree, we may try to resolve things but get nowhere. It starts to become unpleasant.

(From Danish Centre for Conflict Resolution)



## **Strengthen yourself!**

The first thing that disappears when we experience stress is empathy, once empathy goes so does much joy. Stress tends to steal the delight factor in life!

There is no more important time to look after yourself than when you are going through separation. The better we feel about ourselves the less likely it is that conflict escalates. The more we look after ourselves, nurture ourselves and become self aware, the less likely we are to experience conflict out of control.

Choose some buffers to keep yourself sane. If you have children this is even more important as it supports you to continue to parent well.

## **‘Buffers’**

### **Physical**

- Diet, improve diet - group B vitamins and magnesium are important, but potentially so are all the other vitamins and minerals: a balanced healthy diet is essential. Assess the current diet and identify where improvements should be made and commit to those improvements.
- Exercise, take more exercise - generally, and at times when feeling very stressed - exercise burns up adrenaline and produces helpful chemicals and positive feelings.
- Water, ensure that you drink plenty of water, have it in front of you as much as possible. Brain capacity is reduced when we are dehydrated, another stress factor.
- Sleep, make sure that you get sleep enough, 7-8 hours is what an adult needs.
- Relax, explore and use relaxation methods - they do work if given a chance - yoga, meditation, self-hypnosis, massage, a breath of fresh air, anything that works and can be done in the particular situation.
- Reduce toxin intake - obviously tobacco, alcohol especially - they might seem to provide temporary relief but they are working against the balance of the body and contributing to stress susceptibility, and therefore increasing stress itself.



## Social

- Have fun, sing, dance, be with others, have coffee, share a meal, group support – balance.
- Share worries - talk to someone else - off-load, loneliness is a big ally of stress, so sharing the burden is essential.
- Find a de stress buddy.

## Emotional

- Meditate
- Crying, many find that crying - weeping proper tears - has a powerful helpful effect on stress levels. Whatever the science behind crying, a good bout of sobbing and weeping does seem to release tension and stress for many.
- Humour is one of the greatest and quickest devices for reducing stress.
- Take time to smell the flowers, take time to be count your blessings
- Start writing a diary, could be on gratitude, could be reflecting
- Increase self-awareness of personal moods and feelings - anticipate and take steps to avoid stress build-up before it becomes more serious.

## Mental

- Clean up thinking, heighten awareness of self talk, work mindfully on engaging more serving thoughts
- Think really seriously about and talk with others, to identify the causes of the stress and take steps to remove, reduce them or remove yourself (the stressed person) from the situation that causes the stress.
- Understand the type(s) of stressors affecting you (or the stressed person), and the contributors to the stress susceptibility - knowing what you're dealing with is essential to developing the stress management approach.
- Don't try to control things that are uncontrollable - instead adjust response, adapt.
- Step back, look from the outside at the issues that cause the stress. Again journaling is a great tool in seeing ourselves in perspective and perhaps cutting through some of the un-serving beliefs patterns of the mind.
- Be aware of Thinking Distortions stemming from underlying negative core beliefs, which are activated when you are upset. It is seeking an interpretation outside ourselves, leaving us blame free! - with no reponse – ability.



- Distorted thinking or thinking traps:
- Mind jumping:
  - All or nothing thinking
  - Personalisation
  - Permanent
  - Global
- Mind reading, thinking you know what others think
- Mental filter, focusing exclusively on the negative, discounting the positive
- Shoulds and musts – replace should with going to, and can't with won't
- Fortune telling
- Over generalisation – drawing sweeping conclusions based on a single event or insufficient information.
- Catastrophising – always assuming the worst
- Nobody cares
  - Labelling, I failed at X – therefore I am a moron

## **Spiritual**

- Meditation
- Singing
- Praying
- Retreats
- Adopt spiritual practices



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What practices are you going to adopt so that you are more resilient and more able to deal with the conflict?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

Ensure that you commit to a SMART goal (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed) For example: Tomorrow I am going to start walking every day for a minimum of half an hour.



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## Conflict Control Tools

### Quakers 5 Principles of Conflict Management

Approach conflict with an attitude of:

- Respect for self – consider if in 10 years time you will be pleased about your current behaviour.
- Care for others – irrespective of how you feel about the other party, it is just another little soul going through a difficult time. If you are parents, that person will be the other parent of your children for ever.
- Work together to find a solution – have a flow of ideas, be open to ideas.
- Think before reacting – consider if what you want to say will contribute to a positive outcome or not, if 'or not' then don't say anything!
- Expect the best – enter the discussion or mediation believing that it will work out.

### Working on Win/win - I want what's fair for all of us

A win/win approach rests on strategies involving:

- going back to underlying needs
- recognition of individual differences
- openness to adapting ones position in the light of shared information and attitudes
- attacking the problem, not the person.

The Win/Win Approach is certainly ethical, but the reason for its great success is that IT WORKS. Where both people win, both are tied to the solution. They feel committed to the plan because it actually suits them.

Even when trust between the parties is very limited, the Win/Win Approach can be effective. If there's some doubt about the other person keeping their end of the bargain you can make the agreement reciprocal. "I'll do X for you, if you do Y for me."

It's a successful strategy. Usually, co-operation can result in both people getting more of what they want.

**Ask yourself: How great is your need to be right versus contributing to a win/win solution?**



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## Managing Emotions

### SEVEN GOALS - in communicating emotions

- Be committed to the bigger picture eg the welfare of the children, and/or the future relationship with your ex partner.
- Aim to avoid the desire to punish, blame or play games.
- Aim to improve the situation.
- Aim to communicate your feelings appropriately.
- Aim to improve the relationship and increase communication.
- Aim to avoid repeating the same situation.
- Aim to not react but behave from a higher self.

## Handling Yourself

### Ask yourself FIVE QUESTIONS - start by being clear on your intentions

When angry/hurt/frightened:

- Why am I feeling so angry/hurt/frightened? (go back to page 1)
- What do I want to change?
- What do I need in order to let go of this feeling?
- Whose problem is this, really? How much is mine? How much is theirs?
- What is the unspoken message I infer from the situation? (e.g. they don't like me, they don't respect me, I am not valued)



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## **If you are a parent...**

Know that you will be parents together forever.

Make choices now that enable a positive relationship in the future and that spare your children from unnecessary hurt and damage.

Know that it is not just the other person who is being unreasonable. The saying that there is always two sides to every story also applies to this and **you**. The two of you have created a dynamic between you, now actively work on changing that to serve your child or children.

We know that it is not separation that hurts children, it is the conflict between parents. Feedback from children whose parents are going through divorce is: Stop the fighting and please can you just be civil and at least say 'hello'.

## **If you:**

- find it difficult to distinguish between your needs and your children's needs
- find it difficult to be there for your children
- find it difficult to not lose your cool with your children
- can't stop fighting in front of, or in ear shot of your children ...

## **... then you may need counselling or coaching**

- If you are arguing over minor details and want to fight over something minor like \$5 a week, half a day more a month, who will drop the school bags on the weekend etc, then put on your big person's pants, take a deep breath and stop the fight by making wise choices.

**A good relationship with both parents and parental alliance  
is an enormous buffer for children.**

**Give your children your best!**



## References

- The Quakers AVP Programme
- Conflict Resolution Network
- The Danish Centre for Conflict Resolution