

We Have Decided to Leave. How Do We Do It Well?

Read the article first. This worksheet accompanies [Should We Stay Together? How to Ask for the Couples Counseling We Actually Need](#) at ThoughtsFromATherapist.com. Search “should we stay together” on the site to find it. For the parenting details, see [How to Write a Parenting Plan](#) on the same site.

Some couples arrive after the central decision has been made. They are not asking whether to remain together. They need help ending one form of relationship while preserving whatever has to continue, and with children that is a lot. This sheet separates what must be divided from what still has to be shared, and names the collateral damage we are trying to reduce. Separate copies, then compare.

NOT RE-LITIGATING

The decision is made

A couple that has chosen to separate does not need to be asked, again, whether the marriage can be saved. If one of us is still asking, we are not on this sheet yet; we are on the discernment sheet.

DIVIDED AND SHARED

What ends and what continues

The intimate partnership ends. The parenting relationship, the extended family, the shared history, and sometimes the business or the property continue. We sort each thing into one column.

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

What we are protecting

Children, finances, housing, schools, the people around us. Naming the specific things we are trying to protect gives the separation a shared purpose when goodwill runs low.

AMICABILITY

Not the absence of anger

Amicability does not require the absence of anger or grief. It means those emotions do not become the organizing principle of the new family system.

When I am angry or grieving, where will it go so it does not go into the co-parenting?

A WORKED EXAMPLE, FROM THE ARTICLE

ENDS

Living together. Being each other's first call. Sex. Shared finances beyond the children.

CONTINUES

Parenting, for decades. Birthdays, graduations, illnesses, school meetings, weddings, grandchildren.

PROTECTING

The children staying in their school. Each parent able to afford a home in the same town.

WHERE THE GRIEF GOES

A friend, a sibling, a therapist. Not the handoff in the driveway.

What ends, what continues, what we protect

My own copy. A few words per line.

SORTING

Divided and shared

Everything the marriage currently holds, sorted into the column where it belongs after the separation.

ENDS WITH THE MARRIAGE

CONTINUES AFTER IT

COLLATERAL

What we are trying to protect

The children, the finances, housing, the children's schools, our families, a business, our own health. The specific things, in order of importance to me.

COST

What leaving costs that we have not said out loud

Two households cost more than one. Retirement, insurance, property, and the people around us are all affected. Naming the cost does not reopen the decision.

Grief, anger, and the new family system

My own copy, then compare.

FEELING

Where my grief
and anger will go

They are allowed. The question is where they land so that they do not land on the children or in the co-parenting.

COMMUNICATION

How we will talk
now

What we will talk about (logistics, the children), how (text, a shared calendar, a monthly call), and what is no longer each other's business.

NEW PEOPLE

New partners and
the family

What each of us needs from the other when someone new enters the children's lives, and when.

COMPARING COPIES

Where our columns disagree, and the one thing we will ask for help with.

WHAT YOU PUT IN A DIFFERENT COLUMN THAN I DID:

WHAT WE AGREE WE ARE PROTECTING:

WHAT WE WILL ASK THE COUNSELOR TO HELP WITH:

Birthdays, graduations, illnesses, weddings, and grandchildren will keep putting this family in the same room. The work is to make that room bearable, and in time ordinary.