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THERAPEUTIC SEPARATION GUIDELINES

A therapeutic separation is either:

1. A time of constructive re-evaluation, healing, insight building, recovery, learning and practicing tools, and learning and practicing new ways of communicating, or
2. A poorly planned time after which a decision is reached based on unresolved pain, anger and betrayal.

The most constructive therapeutic separation begins with a clear, specific agreement between partners often facilitated by a therapist in a clinical setting. While a therapeutic separation can feel frightening, anxiety provoking, abandoning, triggering, and/or frustrating for one or both members of the couple ship, if both individuals are willing to use the time to focus on their own areas of healing, and learn the tools necessary to come back together, it can be one of the best gifts a couple can give themselves.

Additionally, it is important to note that we ask couples not to make any big decisions [i.e. divorce, selling the home, contacting an attorney, child custody, large purchases such as a car or expensive electronics, start an affair, or even cutting their hair off, or having cosmetic surgeries] for the first 6 months of recovery and during the therapeutic separation. If you are embarking on a therapeutic separation, it is essential to answer the following questions. Couples who are separated and cannot agree on the answers to these question

Instructions:

1. a) Find a quiet location on “neutral ground” where you will not be interrupted.
2. b) Allow enough time for partners to answer the questions separately.
3. c) Discuss each question until you reach agreement. Be very specific and concrete in your answers. This is best done in a counseling office.
4. d) Be flexible in seeking agreements and compromises.
5. e) If children are involved place their well being as a top priority.

Please begin answering the following questions separately and bring in to your therapy session to discuss.

Therapeutic Questions and Planning Worksheet

1. Decide on which partner will be moving out. If one person is the primary caregiver over the other for children, it is best that this person remain in the home. If children are not a consideration, the addicted partner is often the person who will make arrangements to leave the home during the separation:
2. Estimated length of the trial separation? (A specific period no less than 90 days determined by benchmarks and goals, not by time).
3. What benchmarks/goals need to be met or to be practiced by the end of the estimated length of trial separation?
4. State the financial agreements during this time [i.e. how much money will be needed, how the money will be handled, how bills will be paid, the dates, and so forth]:
5. State both partners living arrangements for this period:

6. State specific plans for visits, dates, or other contacts between partners [this would include upcoming special events, children's school or sporting events, weddings, church, etc]. Who will attend what events:
7. State who you will tell, what you will tell and how much you will tell and how you will tell these individuals. Therapists advise to select only safe people to both, this may include family members or close friends. It is best to be very selective and agree on this. Some couples prefer to write an email that they agree on. An example would be: " John and I have been facing challenges in our relationship. In order to heal, recover and re-build trust, we are seeking therapy both individually and for couples. We will be living apart for a period of time during a therapeutic separation. We ask for your prayers and good thoughts of support during this time. And we ask that you hold this confidence as we are sharing with only a specific number of individuals. We will check in periodically on our progress." Thank you for your support and love during this challenging season of healing. In appreciation, John and Jane Doe
8. State the specific counseling expectations, agreement, and recovery plan:

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9. State when and where you will discuss with children, and how much information will be shared.
Please read the chapter from Mending a Shattered Heart on guidelines for disclosing to children:

10. Is there anything which could happen to cause one or both of you to end the separation and proceed immediately to break up or divorce? Be specific.

11. State spiritual concerns and considerations:

12. State specific physical, sexual boundaries:

13. State specific communication boundaries [including text, email, snail mail, and phone calls]:

14. State when you will be planning your couples check in [note: if you are not sure what this is, please work with your therapist to put a plan together]. Often at the start, couples check ins are facilitated in the counseling office, then gradually as the couple builds tools, they meet one time a week with a specific outline to work from:

15. What changes will each partner need to make to renew the relationship commitment?

16. What are your three biggest concerns?

17. What are your three top non-negotiable boundaries:

18. Please list any other requests or concerns below:

We agree to use the time apart to work on our own individual therapy and recovery. If children are a consideration, we agree to put the needs of our children first. We agree to treat one another with respect and honor the guidelines of this agreement. We agree to not make any big decisions for the first 6 months. If one of us decides to change any part of this agreement, we agree to discuss this in a

counseling session. We agree to use discretion during this time in discussing with others. Please sign and date below:

Name: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____ Date: _____