

Separation guidelines

When you first move into separate homes, the old habits don't fit anymore, and nobody hands you the new ones. This is a plain guide to the practical stuff: keys, space, your things, the kids, the digital side, and how to talk about all of it. It isn't a set of rules anyone's imposing on you. It's a starting point for a conversation, so small misunderstandings don't grow into big ones.

Assume less, ask more

Here's the shift almost nobody warns you about, and it's the one I watch trip people up most. After fifteen, twenty, thirty years together, you run on autopilot. You assume you can swing by. You assume the other person already knows the plan. You assume the old routines still apply. Once you're living apart, that autopilot is where a surprising amount of the friction comes from.

So slow down and be deliberate. Ask instead of assume, and say things out loud instead of expecting the other person to read your mind. Rather than just showing up, try: *"Can we meet at the coffee shop Sunday at 10 to talk through the kids' schedule?"* After a marriage where you never had to schedule a thing, that can feel almost too formal. But that small bit of deliberateness is exactly what keeps a dozen little assumptions from turning into a dozen little fights.

Getting into each other's space

Once you're in two homes, "our place" quietly becomes "your place" and "my place," and that shift works better said out loud than assumed. A few things to agree on:

- **Keys.** Does each of you still have a key to the other's home? Are you changing the locks, and if so, by when?
- **Dropping by.** Neither of you shows up unannounced. Knock or ring, and come in only if you're invited.
- **Notice.** How much heads-up do you want before the other comes over?
- **Standing access.** Are there regular reasons one of you needs into the other's place, like a shared garage or a pet? Settle those now, and handle one-off needs as they come up.
- **Emergencies.** Who gets called if something happens?

Your things

Stuff is rarely just stuff in a divorce. Until everything's formally divided, a few ground rules keep belongings from becoming a battleground:

- Don't sell, give away, or throw out anything that belongs to the other person without asking first. If you offer them something and they want it, give them about a week to claim it.
- Don't take things from the other's home, even briefly, without their okay.
- If you stayed in the home, make it easy for the other person to come get their personal things.
- Keep whatever hasn't been divided yet (furniture, clothes, belongings) safe and in good shape, and tell the other person if something gets damaged.

Keep the signals clear

Clear boundaries make this easier; mixed signals make it harder. A kind gesture can get read as “maybe we’re getting back together,” and that misread can hurt more than plain honesty would. It’s okay, better really, to say the quiet part out loud: “*I want to be able to be nice to you without it meaning we’re reconciling,*” or “*It’s too hard having your things here; let’s set a time to move them.*” Saying it is uncomfortable. Not saying it usually costs more.

Short-term awkward is almost always cheaper than long-term confused.

The digital side

This part didn’t exist the last time most separation guides were written, and it’s now where a lot of the friction lives. When you split into two homes, your digital lives stay tangled, so untangle them on purpose, not by accident.

- **Passwords.** Change the passwords on your own accounts: email, banking, anything personal. Not to hide anything; just because shared logins from married life shouldn’t quietly stay open.
- **Shared accounts.** Decide together what happens to the ones you share: streaming, cloud photo libraries, online shopping, the family phone plan. Who keeps what, and when.
- **Location sharing.** If your phones still share location with each other (Find My, Life360, and the like), decide whether to turn it off. Keep it only if you both genuinely agree to, say, to coordinate the kids.
- **Cameras and smart home.** Whoever’s living in the home controls the doorbell camera, smart speakers, and any indoor cameras. If you’re the one who moved out, assume you no longer have a window into that house, and the person who stayed should know what’s still recording.
- **Social media.** Don’t post about the divorce, and don’t post about each other. Muting quietly tends to go better than a dramatic unfollow. And assume anything either of you puts online could end up in the case, because it can.
- **Mail and messages.** Forward mail for whoever moved out, and agree on how you’ll pass along calls, texts, or packages that still land at the old address.

If you have kids

Children feel the split between two homes more than anyone, and a few habits keep them from getting caught in the middle:

- Don’t ask your child to fetch something from the other parent’s home, and don’t make them carry messages or be the go-between. If your child asks to go into the other parent’s place, gently say no, without making the other parent the bad guy.
- If your child needs something from the other parent’s house, arrange it with that parent: pick it up, or have them bring it.
- Keep your word on pick-up and drop-off times. A time range, say 5:00 to 5:30, takes the pressure off. If something comes up, tell the other parent right away.
- Don’t schedule things for the kids during the other parent’s time without checking first. If your child’s invited to something on the other parent’s days, let that parent know, but don’t promise the child they can go.
- **A modern shortcut:** a shared calendar or a co-parenting app keeps schedules and messages in one place, and out of the kids’ hands.

New relationships and dating

This one's delicate, because usually one person has moved on more than the other, and you should never assume the other isn't hurt by it. A few things worth knowing:

- Most divorce lawyers will suggest holding off on a new relationship, or putting one on pause, while the divorce is still pending. There are real reasons for it, worth talking through with your attorney.
- Mental-health and child specialists generally agree that introducing children to a new partner too early is hard on them, and recommend waiting at least six months *after the divorce is final* before doing so.

If the two of you talk it over and agree that dating is okay while the divorce is going on, it helps to sort a few things out in advance:

- Are there places the dating spouse will agree not to bring a new partner (religious services, a favorite restaurant, the kids' activities) to avoid an awkward run-in?
- Are there "safe" places the other spouse will agree to steer clear of, for the same reason?
- How much does the other spouse want to know about the new relationship, and how much stays private?
- What's the understanding about spending money that might still belong to both of you?
- What can you agree on to keep the kids out of the confusion?

How to actually have these talks

None of this works as a page you read alone. It works as a conversation. To set one up so it goes somewhere:

BEFORE YOU SIT DOWN

1. Ask for a time to talk, and share the topics ahead of time so nothing's an ambush. Invite them to add their own.
2. Meet somewhere neutral, when the kids aren't around.
3. Give it a time limit.
4. Agree up front that you'll both try to keep it respectful and useful, and that if either of you feels uncomfortable at any point, for any reason or none, either of you can end it.

Once you're in it, speak from your own side of the table. Try "when this happens, I feel..." instead of "you always...". Saying "*when plans change at the last minute, I feel anxious and out of the loop*" lands very differently than "*you always spring things on me.*" It's the same information, but the first version names how something sits with *you* instead of putting the other person on the defensive, and it tends to invite a fix rather than a fight.

If these talks keep hitting the same wall, that's exactly what the neutrals in a collaborative divorce are there to help with. It's their whole job.