



Living Together, Separating, Divorcing: Surviving During a Pandemic

The following 500-word essay by Margaret and Greg was first published in an e-book created and edited by Michael Lang and Peter Nicholson.

The book contains 75 essays by mediators from 11 countries on surviving in the pandemic from a family law perspective.

It can be purchased as an e-book for approximately \$2 or €2 from Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B088MF1W3M>

Finding a pathway out of a challenging situation

by MARGARET ROSS AND GREG ROONEY

You find yourself suffering emotional and financial stress because of the pandemic lockdown. What do you do? How do you find a way out?

The first answer to these questions is that there is no answer. Well, no *one* answer.

There are a lot of pathways out, but which one do you take? Again, there is no answer to this question? Well, no one answer.

So, what do you do?

You can start by trying a different way of thinking - **let the answer find you.**

So, how do you let the answer find you?

Well, try starting with a non-specific broad goal such as: I want to find the best way of helping discipline my children; I want to find the best way of divorcing my partner while living in the same house or I want to find the best way of coparenting with my separated partner during the lockdown.

These are called oblique goals. The moment you focus on a specific goal you immediately cut out the many other potential opportunities. Being efficient and focused kills diversity. At the moment you desperately need a diversity of options to find your way out.

So, how do I start the journey out?

Again, start with a different way of thinking. It's the non-thinking option. Accept that the past is dead, and the future hasn't happened yet. All you have is the moment you are in. So, be totally present in the moment and be totally observant of what is happening. Observe rather than analyse. You cannot use reason or logic to think yourself out of your current problem.

What do I do next?

Make a small offer of generosity, a gift or concession without comment. Harness the power of silence and let the offer hang in the air. It is a very powerful position and invokes a sense of reciprocity from the receiver. Something will emerge out of this selfless act on your part. You will receive something in return.

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Then what do I do?

Observe what happens out of the interaction and use your intuition to choose your next move. What is adjacent possible to where you are now that moves you in the direction of your broad aim of finding the best path forward. Small steps are more important than big leaps. As you take each step a whole new world opens of adjacent possibilities. Each step opens fresh diversity. You are now on the path out even though it might wind around in all directions.

If you strike resistance or aggression reflect on how it makes you feel. Try responding by saying “I feel sad” (scared, puzzled, anxious et cetera). Again, use silence to let your comment hang in the air. It’s the opposite of saying “you make me feel sad” et cetera. It is a non- accusatory approach.

By speaking about your own feelings, you are holding a mirror up to the person. Again, observe the interaction and use your intuition to select what is adjacent possible to where I am now that moves me forward in the general direction of my goal.

Now is the best time to take the first step.

The oblique approach to goals is drawn from the work of English economist John Kay; being totally present in the moment is drawn from the work of psychoanalysts Wilfred Bion from the UK and Thomas Ogden from the US; the principle of emergence comes from the work of US Nobel Prize Winner for Physics Murray Gell Mann; the adjacent possible is drawn from the work of US medical scientist Stuart Kauffman; acts of generosity and reciprocity are drawn from the French anthropologist Marcel Mauss; the mirror and the ‘I feel’ comes from the French mediator Jacqueline Morineau and the Chinese philosopher Confucius said “the journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step”.

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