

# *Crisis Connection*

## Rules for "Fair" Fighting

### **No ambush**

Make an appointment to talk: (a) for a certain time and place, (b) for a certain issue. Chose a time when you will not be distracted by family members, guests or television and when you both are relatively relaxed. Sit face to face and keep eye contact at the same level. Make a contract to discuss the issue of concern only and agree to avoid those ways of acting that sabotage problem solving. Make a commitment to use the rules of fair fighting.

### **Present your argument sensibly**

As preparation for the discussion; work out for yourself exactly what you want, and the reasons why you want it. Organize your arguments. Be sure that what you are asking for is really what you desire. Express what is going on to the best of your ability. Talk feelings. Tell your partner how you feel about what is going on. Feeling first; solutions later. Get your point across in a constructive way by owning how you feel about the topic. Use the formula sentence, "When you \_\_\_\_\_, I feel \_\_\_\_." This simple statement allows you to take responsibility for your own feelings and behavior without blaming the other person. **Always use "I" statements, NEVER use "you" statements.**

### **Listen carefully to your partner**

Every time your partner makes a point; restate the point in your own words to make sure you understand exactly what your partner means. Before you respond to any point, check to be sure that you understand how your partner feels. Ask questions. Show your partner that you really heard what he or she said. Repeat back what your partner just said. Say, "I heard that you said \_\_\_\_\_ and what I feel about that is \_\_\_\_\_." Listen for the feelings of hurt and threat behind their statements. Ask your partner for clarification if you do not understand what they are saying. **Always use "I" statements, NEVER use "you" statements.**

### **Stick to the issue**

Fight about no more than two related issues at a time. If side issues are raised, these must be laid aside for another "fight." Past history is nearly always irrelevant. Don't pin labels or attributes on your partner. ("You're always...") Stick to the topic. Do not bring in other sore issues. Agree to discuss the pertinent topic only saying, "We are discussing \_\_\_\_\_, not \_\_\_\_\_." Watch for ways you get off the track. Keep coming back to the issue under discussion.

### **Agree on what kind of behavior is acceptable**

This needs to be negotiated between the couple. Some possibilities are: acceptable posture, (e.g. standing or sitting), tone of voice, etc. Stop using techniques that turn up the heat and move you both away from problem solving. Blaming, name calling, threatening, foul language and sarcasm decrease intimacy. Young children believe what they hear their parents saying. They are devastated when they overhear these forms of verbal abuse. These ways of communicating cut down on the possibility of you're getting what you want out of the argument.

### **Keep all blows above the belt**

By the time a couple has spent some time together each knows the sensitive areas of the other. They know just the area in which the other can be hurt. Attacking these areas is a "foul". This assures that the belt-line is not dishonestly set higher than need be. Stop using techniques that

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### **Don't over react**

While it is certainly appropriate and necessary to argue about relatively minor issues so that they don't build up, do not fight with more force than the issue warrants. Are you hiding larger feelings behind something trivial? Watch your use of cursing. Cursing adds negative energy to the confrontation placing the other person in danger of feeling shame. Cuss words are like waving a red flag at a bull and increase the heat of the argument. Know that your use of cuss words only serves to shut the other person down and that they then feel the need to defend themselves further. Do not make empty threats. Do not threaten to leave the relationship or order the other person to get out unless you really mean it. Threatening to break up the relationship only brings up more fear and defensiveness in the other person.

### **If you can't settle the issues, table them for later and set an agreed upon specific time to meet**

Often a complicated issue cannot be resolved in one setting. A temporary truce can often be helpful in rethinking one's own position, cooling off, or simply recovering from fatigue. Time and place to resume the discussion should be agreed upon. Schedule breathing breaks, or set a timer for every two or three minutes for a breathing break. During this time do not think of the argument and what you want to say. Think of being calm and relaxed. Say to yourself I respect my partner and his or her opinions. I respect myself and my opinions. When you start to become confused or upset, breathe deeply from your diaphragm to bring in more energy and stay centered.

### **If you can agree, decide how to carry out your decision**

Who will do what, is there a deadline? Watch your need to be right and win. Remember this important thought:

Do you want to be right or do you want to be happy? Tell the other person what you do want. Remember that you won't always get it but you need to express what you feel is best for you. Keep coming back to what you want but be ready to compromise. Stand firm only on those decisions which compromise your integrity as a person. Offer compromises. *Stop investing in winning and using power plays and figure out what is really important to you.* Tell the other person what you will give up if they give up something of value to them. Keep the negotiation open. Stop every five minutes to sum up what you do agree on and note where the disagreements still lie.

**If you later are dissatisfied with the decision, you must make an appointment for another discussion.** When the discussion is over, evaluate yourself on how you did. Don't be a critical judge about your performance. Remember that you are learning new ways of acting. Be gentle with yourself. Give yourself credit for every time you remembered to "fight fair." Make a contract with yourself on areas that you still need to change. Learning to fight fair is about self responsibility and practice.

Adapted from: G.R. Back & Wyden (1968) The Intimate Enemy at [www.relate.com](http://www.relate.com)

## **How to Have an Argument with your Partner and Remain Friends**

### ***Fair Behavior***

Speaking one at a time and allowing equal time

Looking for compromises

Trying not to generalize

Allowing for time-outs and breathers

Observing rules that you set  
No forcing/hitting/or threats  
Showing personal respect for the other  
Being honest with yourself and the other  
Giving your reasons  
Admitting when you are wrong  
Making your understandings clear by repeating them and writing them down

### ***Unfair Behavior***

Name calling  
Opening old wounds/dredging up the past  
Going off on tangents  
Intimidation, threats of violence  
Changing the rules you made and not saying so  
Expecting there to be a winner and a loser  
Saving up gripes to dump all at once  
Reading the other's mind  
Denying the facts  
Using sex as a leverage  
Gloating over a "victory"  
Appearing to ignore the other



**Violence is always a choice.**

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