

Fair Fighting Rules For Resolving Conflict



Be specific about what is bothering you

Vague complaints are difficult to solve, so be specific and stick to the facts. What is the problem that is bothering you in the moment? Try to deal with one issue at a time.



Express your feelings

Be direct and honest about your feelings. Using "I" messages to describe feelings of disappointment, anger, or hurt shows that you are taking responsibility for your own feelings. *"I felt really disappointed when ..."*



Avoid blame

Avoid 'you' messages such as *"You make me angry..."* or *"You keep doing ..."* because these statements automatically blame and make the other person defensive. Try something like, *"I feel hurt when you..."*



Give time and listen

To resolve a conflict, both people need to express how they feel, so give the other person equal time. Aiming to listen more than you talk is a good place to start. Listening doesn't mean thinking about what you're going to say next. Try to restate what you've heard to let your partner know that you have understood.



Be respectful

Don't talk over the other person, or make comments while they are talking. Be careful of non-verbal expressions too: rolling your eyes, yawning, smirking, or turning away all work against fighting fairly. Swearing, sarcasm, or calling the other person names is unfair and will put them on the defensive.



Don't make threats

Threats back people into a corner, and to save face they may choose the ultimatum. Threatening to leave a relationship during an argument will create anxiety about being abandoned and makes your partner less confident in your commitment to the relationship.



Mind reading

Don't assume you know what your partner means. Don't guess, imagine, take for granted, or interpret what you think gestures or facial expressions mean. Ask your partner to clarify what they mean. It's OK to ask *"What are you thinking?"* Equally, don't expect your partner to read your mind. Be direct and tell them what you are thinking.



Lower the volume

Try not to raise your voice. Yelling or shouting can feel threatening for the other person and can trigger *freeze*, *appease*, *escape* or *fight* responses in the other person. Try speaking softly.



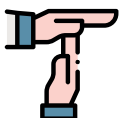
Don't play games

When you are not being clear and honest about what you need, or truthful about your feelings, you are playing a game. Games that people play include: *Poor me*, *See what you made me do*, *Silent treatment*, *Yes ... but ...*, *If you loved me ...*, and *Martyr*.



Hold hands

If not literally, then adopt the attitude that *"we are not fighting, we are focused on solving a problem together"*. You are on the same team, think about how you could compromise to achieve a win-win.



Time out

Limit your discussion to no more than 30 minutes. If you haven't reached a resolution by then, agree to take a time-out to calm down, reflect on why you feel the way you do, and think about how to express yourself positively. Remember to set a time that same day when you can meet and discuss things again. Don't walk away without letting your partner know when you'll be back.



Avoid generalizing

Saying 'always' or 'never' (*"You always ..."*, *"You never ..."*) can mean that you're generalizing or exaggerating. If you are trying to describe how the other persons' behaviour that bothers you, it is better to stick to specific examples.



Focus on solutions and compromise

Remember that the idea is not to 'win', but to come to a solution that is satisfactory to both of you. Brainstorm ideas, propose specific solutions, and invite your partner to do the same.