

## Fair Fighting Rules

Conflict is inevitable, but ineffective and destructive fighting can destroy relationships.  
*Exercise: Review these guidelines with your partner and identify each person's greatest strengths and weaknesses in the realm of managing conflict.*

1. Timing: seek your partner's buy-in to agree on when a tense discussion will happen
2. Do not argue when intoxicated, tired, or hungry
3. Explicitly agree on what problem is being discussed (you can write it down)
4. Deal with a *current* problem; don't dredge up the past
5. Stay focused on that one issue and avoid adding on others
6. Don't debate about insignificant details
7. Resist responding defensively
8. Take responsibility by using "**I**" **statements** (*instructions on my website under "forms"*)
9. Be gentle and direct, and resist sarcasm
10. Don't read your partner's mind or expect your partner to read yours
11. Take turns Listening-Reflecting-Clarifying (*see my 2/22/15 blog post for more info*)
12. Give each person equal time - avoid monopolizing or "lecturing"
12. Participate: avoid "stonewalling" (going silent)
13. Avoid rolling eyes, angry sighs, smirking, yawning, finger pointing etc.
12. Speak softly. Honor your partner's request for lowering your voice
14. Do not interrupt. If it seems important to do so, ask permission to interrupt.
15. Attack the *issue*, not the *person*
  - \*No name-calling/ shaming/ global criticisms/ character assassinations
  - \*No violence (slapping, punching, pushing, grabbing, hitting, restraining)
  - \*No escalating words/ behaviors (yelling, obscenities, taunting, belittling)
16. Avoid "You always..." & "You never..." – these invite defensiveness
17. Don't save up feelings and dump them all at once; try to air feelings often
18. Ask for a break or a slower pace when you need time to calm down or think
19. Discuss more challenging arguments in relatively short segments. Agree when you will come back together to continue the discussion.
20. If you need to walk away or leave, reassure your partner, "I need a break, I'll be back".
21. Give each other the ability to withdraw or change your mind
22. Sitting or lying close, or holding hands while talking can be mutually soothing
23. Sitting or walking side-by-side while talking can decrease stress/ overwhelm
24. Ask questions that will *clarify*, not *judge or criticize*
25. Don't involve other people or their opinions of the situation
26. Don't make threats or bring up divorce in the heat of an argument
27. Be willing to apologize and take responsibility for your mistakes
28. Brainstorm possible solutions together and be willing to compromise
29. Look for opportunities to praise your partner/ acknowledge positives

### THE GOALS OF HEALTHY CONFLICT ARE:

- \* **Building connection & understanding (*not polarization*)** \*
- \* **Achieving mutually satisfying resolution (*not "winning"*)** \*