

Tips on Fighting Fair

Fair fighting is a way to effectively manage conflict and the intense feelings that often accompany conflict. Following these basic guidelines can help keep disagreements from becoming destructive.

Fair Fighting: Ground rules

Remain calm. Try not to overreact to difficult situations. By remaining calm, it is more likely that others will be willing to consider your point of view.

Express feelings in words, not actions. If you feel so angry or upset that you think you may lose control, take a "time out" and do something to calm yourself down: take a walk, do some deep breathing, play with the dog, write in your journal- whatever works for you.

Be specific about what is bothering you. Vague complaints are hard to work on.

Deal with only one issue at a time. Don't introduce other topics until each is fully discussed. This avoids the "kitchen sink" effect where people throw in all their complaints while not allowing anything to be resolved.

No hitting below the belt. Attacking areas of personal sensitivity creates an atmosphere of distrust, anger, and vulnerability.

Avoid accusations. Accusations will lead others to focus on defending themselves rather than on understanding you. Instead, talk about how someone's actions made you feel.

Avoid extreme language. Try to avoid using words like "never" or "always." Such generalizations are usually inaccurate and will heighten tensions.

Avoid make believe. Exaggerating or inventing a complaint - or your feelings about it - will prevent the real issues from surfacing. Stick with the facts and your honest feelings.

Don't stockpile. Storing up lots of grievances and hurt feelings over time is counterproductive. It's almost impossible to deal with numerous old problems for which recollections may differ. Try to deal with problems as they arise.

Avoid clamming up. Positive results can only be attained with two-way communication. When one person becomes silent and stops responding to the other, frustration and anger can result. However, if you feel yourself getting overwhelmed or shutting down, you may need to take a break from the discussion. Just let your partner know you will return to the conversation as soon as you are able and then don't forget to follow-up.

Establish common ground rules. Consider having your partner-in-conflict read and discuss this information with you. When both people accept positive common ground rules for managing a conflict, resolution becomes much more likely.