

Fair Fighting: Step by Step...

1. Before you begin, ask yourself, "What exactly is bothering me? What do I want the other person to do or not do? Are my feelings in proportion to the issue?"
2. Know what your goals are before you begin. What are the possible outcomes that could be acceptable to you?
3. Remember that the idea is not to win but to come to a mutually satisfying solution to the problem.
4. Set a time for a discussion with your partner-in-conflict. It should be as soon as possible but agreeable to both persons. Springing a conversation on someone when they are unprepared may leave them feeling like they have to fend off an attack. If you encounter resistance to setting a time, try to help the other person see that the problem is important to you.
5. State the problem clearly. At first, try to stick to the facts; then, once you've stated the facts, state your feelings. Use "I" messages to describe feelings of anger, hurt, or disappointment. Avoid "you" messages such as, "you make me angry...."; instead, try something like, "I feel angry when you...."
6. Invite the other person to share his or her point of view. Be careful not to interrupt, and genuinely try to hear his or her concerns and feelings. Try to restate what you heard in a way that lets your partner know you fully understood, and ask your partner to do the same for you.
7. Try to take the other's perspective; that is, try to see the problem through his or her eyes. The opposing viewpoint can make sense to you, even if you don't agree with it.
8. Propose specific solutions, and invite the other person to propose solutions, too.
9. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each proposal.
10. Be willing to compromise. Allowing the other person only one option will make it difficult to resolve the concern. When you reach an agreement on the way, celebrate! Decide together on a time to check-in, discuss how things are working, and make changes to your agreement if necessary. If no solution has been reached regarding the original problem, schedule a time to revisit the issue and continue the discussion.