

Guidelines for Fighting With Your Partner

By Barrington H. Brennen, 2000, 2021

Question: Dear Sir: When there is an argument between my husband and me, it gets really messy. It escalates into an angry outburst and most times both of us get hurt. What can we do to stop this? Signed: Want to Fight Fairly

Answer: Dear Friend, too many married folks, like you and your husband, believe that when there is an argument there must always be a "winner," and the winner must be you. Therefore, it always becomes a "win-lose" situation. As a result of this, some couples would only give up a heated argument when they are emotionally and physically exhausted. Sometime, couples would "fight" for hours, deep into the night, just because neither one want to lose.

When romantic partners/husbands and wives fight (emotionally/verbally) they must have guidelines for fair fighting. If not, someone will always get hurt. Dr. Howard Markman, in his book "Fighting for Your Marriage" states that "Marriage is about teamwork. Two separate individuals may see things differently and might make different decisions. But often the best solution will be a compromise in which neither of you gets everything you wanted. The reason is that you won't have a great marriage if you get your way all the time."

The goal is to win as a team, with solutions that show mutual respect and bring you closer as a couple. "Sure, at times" says Markman, "you may give up a little as an individual, but if you can gain as a couple, the exchange can be more than worth it"

GUIDELINES FOR FAIR FIGHTING

Here are nine guidelines to assist married couples in fair fighting.

1. Fight by mutual consent. Don't insist on a fight at a time when one of you can't handle this type of strain. A good fight demands two ready participants.
2. Stick to the present. Don't dredge up the past mistakes and faults about which you can do nothing.
3. Don't hit below the belt. In you live together, you discover each other's sensitive areas. Don't throw them at each other.
4. Don't quit; work it out Bring the fight to a mutual conclusion. Otherwise, it will just recur again and again.
5. Stick to the subject. Limit the fight to the subject. Don't throw every other problem into it; take them at a different time.
7. Don't try to win, EVER. If one wins, the other loses and begins to build resentment about the relationship. That destroys rather than builds the relationship.

8. Respect Crying. It is a valid response to how we feel, but don't let crying sidetrack you. It is a response for men as well as women.
9. No violence. Physical violence violates all of the above rules for fighting by mutual consent.

Remember, a fight between married partners has the purpose of clearing the air and expressing deep feelings in order to build a more unified life. Keep your goal in mind--the goal of sharing your lives with each other.

WORDS NOT TO USE WHEN FIGHTING

Here are some words romantic partners are not to use when fighting. These words are: "You never." "I told you so." "You always." "I don't want to discuss it." "When will you ever learn?" "How many times do I have to tell you?" These are some of the words that "hit below the belt," that make a partner defensive, and that creating a win-lose argument.

WORDS TO USE FOR FAIR FIGHTING

Here are some words husbands and wives should use when fighting fairly. These words are "I'm sorry." "I need you." "Please help me." "I did wrong." "Thank you." "I love you."

EXAMPLES

Wrong: You never clean the house well.

Right: I am hurt when you do not clean the house well.

Wrong: You never come home on time.

Right: I am upset when you come home late.

Wrong: You always do things that hurt me.

Right: I am disappointed when you do things that hurt me.

Wrong: You always drink too much beer.

Rights: I am unhappy when you drink too much beer.

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