

# Fighting Fair

By Unknown

## Introduction

There are three (3) major assumptions:

- Disagreement and conflict are inevitable in intimate relationships.
- Styles of expressing anger are learned and therefore can be changed.
- Angry feelings depend on one's perception of the situation.

Developing self knowledge, listening, and communication skills are keys to fair fighting.

Generally we think of fights as angry confrontations between two or more people where tempers flare, voices are raised, and insults are exchanged. This way of resolving conflict, while unfortunately common, usually results in bitterness, distrust, and desire for revenge. The issues may be temporarily settled, but one or both partners feel resentful, angry or hurt. Both partners can experience a loss of intimacy.

Clean, fair fights on the other hand, are confrontations in which disagreements and grievances are dealt with according to a specific set of guidelines. Applying these principles, along with the skills of active listening and collaborative attitude allows differences to be negotiated.

Both partners will be more likely to feel refreshed, resolved, and relieved that the important issues have been dealt with. Successful fights tend to clear up problems and increase intimacy by helping each partner understand the other better.

The following guidelines highlight some of the major fair and unfair fighting techniques couples use with each other. Remember, what you need to decide is not "Should I express my anger?" or even "How should I express my anger?", but "How can I communicate to my partner about this issue so it can be resolved?"

## GETTING READY

- Deal with small but significant issues when they happen.
- Be able to let go of anger generated by trivial issues.
- Pick a good time. Deal with big issues as soon as possible, preferably when you're both prepared to deal with them. Make and keep appointment to fight if necessary.
- Know what you are fighting about. Be specific, limited and direct with your complaint. Bring up one thing at a time.

Unfair:

- Avoiding or ignoring an issue your partner feels is important
- Giving "the silent treatment"
- Going home to mother
- Bring up issue to embarrass you partner
- Gunny sacking – saving up little hurts and hostilities then dumping them on your partner all at once.

## **INITIATING**

- Report your anger appropriately using “I” statements (“I’m furious about...”)
- Be specific and concise.
- Say what you really mean.
- Stay in the present; use current examples.
- Deal with partner’s behavior, not his/her personality.

Unfair:

- Generalizing – “You never...” or “I’m always...”
- Labeling, name calling, character assassination – (“You bastard”)
- Mind reading – telling your partner what s/he is thinking and feeling
- Dwelling on past grievances
- Accusations, blaming your partner for your problem
- Hitting below the belt, purposely calling attention to known weaknesses or areas of sensitivity
- Exaggerating – overacting to a situation or making idle threats or ultimatums.

## **RESPONDING**

- Count to 10, or more if you’re really attacked. At least at first, try not to take your partner’s anger personally.
- Let your first response to a grievance be an attempt to understand your partner’s perceptions, values and feelings – “Maybe she’s had a rough day”,
- Be an active listener – express back to your partner what you understand his/her thoughts and feelings are.
- Be sensitive. Avoid fighting back when your partner is just letting off steam.
- Check out feelings and thoughts you think your partner has if you think you know but they aren’t saying.
- If you are wrong, admit it!

Unfair:

- Cross-complaining; responding to partner’s initial complaint with one of your own
- Ignoring partner
- Belittling partner or issues
- Assuming partner should know what you are thinking or feeling when you haven’t said anything.
- Sulking

## **NEGOTIATING – WIN/WIN**

- After you understand how your partner is feeling, try to find out what it is your partner is really interested in obtaining by making the complaint or grievance or by not responding to you.
- Express your interest in coming to a solution which is satisfactory to you both... a position in which you can both “win”.
- Discuss each other’s perceptions. How is it that your partner sees things so differently from you?
- Try to find a number of ways you can both get something of what you want. Consider as many options as possible from all sides of the issue.

- Keep to the subject. Try to resolve one issue before moving to another.

Unfair:

- Presenting no-negotiable demands
- Thinking your partner must lose if you are to win ( and vice versa)
- Ignoring your partner's strong expression of emotions.

## **ENDING**

- Having physical safety valves for excess emotion (jogging, biking, listening to music, etc.)
- Call a foul when you feel a guideline has been broken.
- Be ready to forgive.
- If the fight isn't resolved right now, make an appointment to finish it later. Allow for interim solutions.
- If the fight is resolved, try to finish with an expression of positive feelings that you've worked together successfully.

Unfair:

- Pretending to go along, or to agree when you really don't
- Withholding affections, breaking previous agreements
- Continuing with repetitious, stale arguments with no progress being made toward resolution.