



Tips for Fighting Fair

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Fighting Fair in Relationships

All relationships have conflict at some point. Many couples try to avoid it--mostly because they don't know how to make fighting work "for" their relationship. Conflict can be a good thing if done correctly. It allows each person to be honest with themselves and their partner about their opinions and desires. The key is to remember how to fight fair in a relationship.

The following are some rules to abide by in order to make your fights fair:

1. Respect is a must. No name calling, personal attacks, interrupting, or sarcasm, etc. Disrespect will only cause your partner to be disrespectful back. If you find yourself going down this path, apologize immediately.
2. Stay on topic. If you skip from one issue to the next, you are likely to not resolve the initial issue.
3. Ask yourself this question throughout the discussion, "Is what I'm about to say going to help this situation?" If the answer is "no," don't say it!
4. Don't sweep issues under the rug. Issues should be brought up at the earliest moment--preferably daily if possible. Otherwise, it may build up over time and eventually explode. It is much easier to tackle an issue before it grows into resentment.
5. Try not to overload your partner with too many grievances at one time. This can be overwhelming and shaming. Your partner may become hopeless about your relationship's ability to survive. Be specific with your concerns. You may need to think through what is going on with you and get clarity as to why you are really upset.

6. No absolute thinking. Words like “Always, never, every time, all the time, etc.” are off limits. Using one of these phrases will result in your partner trying to remember any evidence they can think of to combat your statement. This distracts them from listening to the rest of your concern.
7. Speak your needs. Tell your partner what you need from them in the moment. If you need help solving a problem, a chance to vent, support, or empathy, it is important for your partner to be informed of your expectations. They can’t read your mind.
8. No one-uping. This is when one person introduces a gripe, and your partner responds with “Yeah but you did ____ last week and I didn’t say anything.” Doing this minimizes your partner’s concern and tells them that you are only worried about making yourself look better, rather than owning your faults. If your partner has a legitimate gripe to bring up, gently request that you discuss the initial concern first and that you will visit their issue once the first one is resolved.
9. Time outs are okay. Sometimes we just need a break from the heat of a discussion. Give yourselves permission to call a time out. The key to this is setting a time limit and making a commitment to come back to it. It is important to respect a time out once it is called. Following your partner into the bedroom yelling at them is not respecting their time out. Time outs are not avoiding or running away from the issue if you make a deal to come back to it at a specific time (i.e. after dinner, when I get back from the store, etc.).
10. No manipulative cheap shots. (i.e. “You don’t love me,” “You must not care about me,” “You are just like your mother,” etc.)
11. Remember this isn’t a competition. Having a win/lose mentality will only hurt your relationship and break down the connection and intimacy you have with your partner. This mindset actually creates two losers--not just one. There is no room for comments like “I told you so” in fair fighting.

12. Focus on your feelings, not the other person's actions. Use "I" statements as much as possible. When feelings can be the focus of the discussion, you are able to avoid the he said/she said cycle. No one can argue with your feelings. Also be open to your partner's feelings during the discussion. Never tell someone how they should feel or that the way they feel is wrong. You completely invalidate their perspective when you do this. Your partner's feelings are part of their reality. How someone feels should not be argued about. Be careful with this one, though. Make sure you discuss actual feelings--not just thoughts or opinions. For example, saying "I feel like you are being critical of me" is not a feeling. Saying it like this often leads to your partner getting defensive. Instead say something like, "I feel attacked." Just because you use the words "I feel" doesn't mean it is an actual feeling.
13. Strive to be heard when you are communicating. Practicing active listening skills can lead to better understanding of what your partner is trying to communicate. It is good to repeat what you hear your partner saying once they are done to ensure the message has been heard correctly. Everyone wants to be heard and feel that what they have to say is important and valuable.
14. Never assume what your partner is thinking or feeling. It is good to ask them first before believing your assumption is true. It is also important to not predict what your partner will say or do in a situation before it happens. This could cause you to enter the discussion ready to fight and defend yourself, which may cause unnecessary reactivity in your partner.
15. Try to look at the issue from your partner's perspective. Doing so does not mean you give up your stance or agree with them, but just means you're open-minded to other ways of thinking. Being stubborn and controlling could create a stand off or resentment, which will get you nowhere.

16. Remember that fights aren't always personal. Many times, the issue at hand is linked to some deep rooted, unresolved issues. Try to empathize with your partner as they are trying to heal from a painful past.
17. Always consider compromise as an option. It is also okay to agree to disagree about certain issues.
18. Have a teamwork approach and be on the same team! If you look at problem solving from a team perspective, the issue will be resolved much quicker and easier. Ask yourself what you are willing to do to solve the problem.
19. Forgive each other and yourself. Remember that no one is perfect. Having expectations for your partner to be perfect will only result in disappointment and pain for you. Each person has contributed to this problem in their own way. Make sure you own your part of it and learn what you need to do differently next time.
20. Remember that you won't tackle all the giant issues in one sitting. Allow yourself time to process the issue before committing to a solution. Moving over an issue too quickly tends to breed resentment and rug sweeping.

Implementing these tips can make a drastic difference in how you and your partner discuss conflictual topics. But remember, it is okay to seek out a professional to help if you don't feel you are making progress or following these rules. Oftentimes, having a therapist present to referee the discussion can help you stay on track and help keep the conflict from further damaging the relationship.

Remember these guidelines next time you need to resolve conflict with a loved one. Conflict done right can enhance the level of intimacy in your relationship. When that happens, everyone is a winner!

About Renewed Horizon

Renewed Horizon is a Christian counseling practice that serves individuals, couples, families, and teens to address difficulties in life. It is a place to find guidance, healing, and hope when life feels hopeless and unimaginable.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” ~ II Corinthians 5:17



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