

RULES FOR FAIR FIGHTING

Conflict is a healthy, normal, and probably inevitable part of most relationships. When conflict is approached in a healthy way, it can strengthen relationships rather than harm them. Rules for fair fighting give the parties the tools and techniques necessary to help generate positive results when conflicts arise;

1. **Establish Rules for Fair Fighting.** When parties accept positive common ground rules for managing a conflict, resolution becomes much more likely.
2. **Remain Calm.** Try not to overreact to difficult situations and you will find others will be more likely to consider your viewpoint.
3. **Express Feelings in Words, Not Actions.** Speak directly and honestly about how you feel. If you start to feel so angry or upset that you feel you may lose control, take a "time out".
4. **Walk Away.** If either party walks away from the other, they must be allowed to have space, there is no following or yelling through doors allowed.
5. **Be Specific About what is Bothering You.** The more specific the better: vagueness is frustrating for people.
6. **One Issue at a Time.** Fully discuss one issue at a time, then find a resolution, then move on to the next issue.
7. **No Attacking.** Attacking areas of personal sensitivity creates an atmosphere of distrust, anger, and vulnerability.
8. **No Blaming.** Talk about how someone's actions made you feel rather than talking about what they did to you.
9. **Don't Generalize.** Avoid words like "never" or "always" since these words are used inaccurately and cause frustration.
10. **Be Real.** Just stay with the facts and your honest feelings as exaggerating or inventing a complaint or feelings will prevent the real issues from being resolved.
11. **Stay Present.** Deal with problems as they arise. Storing up lots of grievances and hurt feelings over time is counterproductive as they are impossible to deal with.
12. **Keep Communicating.** Only when both parties are communicating can anything be resolved. Keep communicating, or postpone the discussion to a later time when everyone is more prepared.
13. **Accept an Apology.** If one person apologizes for their behavior, the other party must accept the apology.

When nothing seems to work, seek the help of a professional therapist or counselor. Sometimes the intervention of a professional will help greatly in addressing the real issues and finding resolution.

STEPS FOR FAIR FIGHTING

To make the Rules for Fair Fighting effective in resolving conflict, use the following steps;

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 acceptable outcomes for you?
3. Set out to find a mutually acceptable outcome, not a "win".
4. Set a time for a discussion with the other party. It should be as soon as possible but agreeable to both persons. Do not spring a surprise 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 effective communication skills and speak with "I" statements.
6. Invite the other party to share his/her point of view, and use active listening skills. Do not interrupt, and genuinely try to hear his/her concerns and feelings. Use feedback to validate what they are sharing.
7. Use empathy to understand the conflict from the other's point of view. The "opposing" viewpoint can make sense even if you don't agree.
8. Propose specific solutions, and invite the other person to propose solutions too.
9. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each proposed solution; look for a mutually acceptable solution.
10. Be ready for some compromise. When there is agreement on a proposal for change, celebrate! If no solution has been reached regarding the original problem, schedule a time to begin the discussion again.
11. If both parties agree that there is no resolution possible, get help from a professional therapist or counselor who can see options that are sometimes not easily identified.