

# Fighting Fairly

1st February 2020

Differences of opinion are a natural part of relationships. Even if you and your partner have a very strong and loving relationship, you won't agree on every issue and may sometimes have major blowups. What's important is how you resolve these conflicts.

Knowing how to fight fairly—or to resolve your differences in a respectful way—is vital to the success of most relationships. Whether you disagree over one or two big issues or a lot of smaller ones, it's important to try to avoid saying things that could hurt somebody you love.

## Tips on fighting fairly

Fighting fairly involves paying attention to several different things at once: your words, your tone of voice, your body language, and your instincts about someone else's mood and whether it's a good time to argue. Here are some tips:

Be truthful but kind. Choose words that express your concerns directly and honestly but that won't leave lasting wounds. Remember that being kind includes listening actively and making an effort not to interrupt.

Watch your tone of voice. Try to keep your tone calm and to speak slowly and respectfully. Keep your volume down. A loud, harsh, or shrill voice can unintentionally inflame an argument.

Pay attention to your body language. Avoid gestures such as pointing, finger-wagging, or eye-rolling.

Don't argue or bring up emotionally charged subjects if one of you has been drinking or using drugs or is already upset. You won't be able to think clearly or may not remember your discussion the next day.

Avoid fighting when you're exhausted or hungry. Rethink the old saying, "Never go to bed angry." If you try to resolve every disagreement before you go to bed—especially if you're dealing with a big issue—you may have major arguments because you're too exhausted to think rationally or to explore all your options. It's also helpful to avoid bringing up a difficult subject right after one of you gets home from work or just before a meal, when both of you

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may be hungry and edgy.

Screen out social media and other electronic distractions. Turn off the TV or computer and put your phone away. These distractions may send the message to your partner that you don't take the subject seriously.

Have big or loud arguments out of earshot of children. Children can benefit from watching adults resolve smaller disagreements—such as which movie to see or where to go on vacation—in thoughtful ways. But even older children may be frightened by intense disagreements that have no immediate solution, particularly if one parent criticizes the other.

Be careful how you communicate in email, texts, and voice mail messages. Email, texts, and voice mail messages may come across as harsher than you intend because your partner won't have the nonverbal cues that could soften them, such as a smile or hug. Additionally, resentment may fester if your partner can't respond right away.

Consider having certain discussions outside your home. If you have to resolve a large issue, consider going for a walk or to a park or café that you both like. This can be an especially good idea if your home makes it hard to screen out distractions or if you are concerned that your children might overhear you. Having your talk in neutral territory or in public also reduces the possibility of an angry outburst.

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