

## Learning To "Fight Fair" In A Relationship

from the American Counseling Association

Even in the most loving of relationships there are going to be times when the two of you don't agree about something. When that happens, it's important to be able to disagree in a productive, helpful way.

Understanding how to disagree is a sign of a healthy relationship. It's realizing that you can have opposite viewpoints, yet know that you're still safe, physically and emotionally, because each of you trusts the other person to eventually work through this.

An important part of having healthy disagreements is making sure that you're "fighting fair." Some basic strategies can help prevent minor differences from growing into major fights.

1. Make factual statements. First-person statements, such as, "I'm upset that you didn't call about running late," work well, but broad generalizations that start with "You never..." or "You always..." are exaggerations that are usually not true and tend to cloud up the issue.

2. No hitting below the belt. Hurtful statements about your partner's character, personality or appearance will only bring anger and retaliation.

3. Stick to the subject. Bringing up past issues, old hurts and unrelated problems, will not resolve the current disagreement.

4. Talk calmly and don't yell. When emotions take over, the result is a lot of noise and hurt, but not much problem-fixing progress. Speak in a normal tone of voice and express your feelings with first-person statements about how you really feel. Stay as calm as possible. If emotions become too strong, take a break to let things quiet down.

5. Accept that feelings are never right nor wrong, they just are. It isn't possible to judge feelings, but behaviors can and should be judged.

6. Try to pick a good time to disagree. If you're overly angry, rushed or tired, a minor problem can easily become a major fight. Instead, try to find a time when you're both more likely to be in a better frame of mind.

7. Clarify any decisions made. If you've been able to settle a problem or find a compromise, take the time to clearly restate what you've both decided and agreed to do.

8. No physical attacks! Ever!

Every relationship has disagreements, but learning to deal with them fairly helps deepen and strengthen a relationship. But if you find that fighting seems to be non-stop and "fighting fair" isn't happening, consider consulting a professional counselor who specializes in relationship issues.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org*

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