

Five Rules for Fair Fighting

There are 5 essential rules for fair fighting, one for each finger of your hand. You should commit these to memory. Whenever a rule is violated, it means the fighting has become too intense, and you need to take at least a ½ hour breather. Start with an agreement that you will solve the issue at hand.

Rule 1: No Physical Threat or Action. No hitting, pushing, shoving, throwing things, or other physical threat. This is important so that everyone feels safe, and because any action in this category is really about intimidation and domination.

Rule 2: No Yelling. No verbal intimidation, raising voice, shouting, yelling. Again, this is about intimidation and domination. It escalates a fight unnecessarily and violates another person's boundaries. The term "yelling" is very subjective, and can lead to attempts to argue whether someone is arguing or not. If you raise your voice, you are violating this rule.

Rule 3: No Name-Calling. No insults or other verbal references. Name-calling is dirty fighting, and introduces elements outside of the issue that caused the disagreement. Again, it is an attempt to gain an advantage.

Rule 4: No Raising Other Issues. No bringing in past history or side issues. This always leads to attempts to place the blame/responsibility elsewhere. It implies "I did this because you did that." Solve the issue at hand, then if the other is a real issue, try to solve that at another time. But if there is still an issue from the past, it points to the fact that you are either not solving the issues as they arise or you are not letting them go when they are solved.

Rule 5: No Threats To Leave. No threats to leave or divorce. This is unfair, and restricts the potential for really solving an issue. It creates a sense of abandonment that serves as a way of getting the other person to let go of the issue.

That's it! Five simple rules that, if followed, will absolutely transform your fights, allowing them to be discussions that can be solved.

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Anger Management The Time-Out Process

Who? Time outs are helpful to use in relationships that you want to maintain. You would not use this procedure with strangers or with others with whom you have not already discussed the process.

When? Either partner can call a time out if a discussion/argument is starting to feel out of control. Most people cannot think clearly when angry, so postponing the discussion until both people are calmer is helpful.

**** VERY IMPORTANT:** Discuss the use of this procedure at a calm time.

Key points to discuss:

1. Choose a mutually agreed-upon signal for the use of time out.

Note: It is best to have both a verbal and nonverbal (hand signal) way of communicating the need to take a time out

2. Both agree that the partner will not follow the person who is taking the time out.
3. When someone calls a time out, end the discussion immediately. Trying to get in the last word is not helpful.
4. When you choose to take a time out, you need to tell the other person
 - a. What you are going to do
 - b. Where you are going (e.g., next room, for a drive, to a friend's house)
 - c. When you will return (certain number of minutes/hours)

Example: "I'm going to Wal-Mart to cool off, and I'll be back in an hour."

While taking the time out:

It is not helpful to obsess about how angry you feel at the other person during this time. Rather, it's a time to cool down so the discussion later can be more productive. Thinking about options for how to solve the problem can be helpful. You can consider what to do to improve the situation and make things work for both partners.

Upon returning to discuss:

1. The person who initiated the time out approaches his/her partner in a kind, gentle manner.
2. Each person presents his/her solution to the problem, and the other person listens without interrupting.
3. Both people focus on what aspects of the solution will work (rather than focusing on what won't work).
4. Together, choose parts of both solutions that will satisfy both parties.

Pointers for the discussion:

Do	Be flexible. Listen carefully. Be open to compromise. Use <i>I</i> statements.
Don't	Focus on "all-or-none" solutions. Be rigid in only being open to your solution (e.g., "my way or the highway"). Criticize the other person for his/her ideas.

Local Treatment Options for Veterans Dealing with Anger-Management Issues

1. Anger-Management Class
2. Couples or Family Therapy
3. Psychiatric Medications

Adapted from presentation by Dan Jones, Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist

Passive, Aggressive, and Assertive Communication

Passive Communication

When using passive communication an individual does not express their needs or feelings. Passive individuals often do not respond to hurtful situations, and instead allow themselves to be taken advantage of or to be treated unfairly.

Traits of passive communication:

- Poor eye contact
- Allows others to infringe upon their rights
- Softly spoken
- Allows others to take advantage

Aggressive Communication

Aggressive communicators violate the rights of others when expressing their own feelings and needs. They may be verbally abusive to further their own interests.

Traits of aggressive communication:

- Use of criticism, humiliation, and domination
- Frequent interruptions and failure to listen to others
- Easily frustrated
- Speaking in a loud or overbearing manner

Assertive Communication

With assertive communication an individual expresses their feelings and needs in a way that also respects the rights of others. This mode of communication displays respect for the each individual who is engaged in the exchange.

Traits of assertive communication:

- Listens without interrupting
- Clearly states needs and wants
- Stands up for personal rights
- Good eye contact

Relationship Conflict Resolution

Focus on the problem, not the person.

When a disagreement turns to personal insults, raised voices, or mocking tones, the conversation is no longer productive. Be careful to focus on the problem without placing blame on your partner. If a disagreement becomes personal, you should pause the conversation.

Use reflective listening.

Oftentimes during arguments we focus on getting our own point across rather than listening to our partner. Before responding to your partner, restate what they have said to you in your own words. Continue this process until your partner agrees that you understand. Next, share your side. Your partner should reflect back your ideas in their own words until they too understand. Using this technique will help both individuals feel listened to and understood, even if you disagree.

Use "I" statements.

When sharing a concern, begin your sentence with "I". For example: "I feel hurt when you don't tell me you'll be late". With this sentence format we show that we are taking responsibility for our own emotion rather than blaming our partner. The alternative sentence—"You never tell me when you're going to be late"—will often cause a partner to become defensive.

Know when to take a time-out.

When you and your partner are becoming argumentative, insulting, or aggressive, it's a good idea to take a time-out. Have a plan in place so you or your partner can call for a break when needed. Spend some time doing something alone that you find relaxing. When you've both calmed down, you and your partner can return to solving the problem. Be sure that you do return—it isn't a good idea to leave these issues unaddressed.

Work toward a resolution.

Disagreement is a normal part of a relationship. If it becomes clear that you and your partner will not agree, focus on a resolution instead. Try to find a compromise that benefits both individuals. Ask yourself if this disagreement really matters to your relationship, and let yourself move on if not.

"I" Statements

Taking responsibility for your feelings will help you improve your communication when you feel upset or angry. One way to achieve this is by using *"I" statements*. This technique will allow you to communicate what is upsetting while minimizing blaming. If our statements feel too blaming, the person we are trying to speak to will often become defensive.

"I" Statement format: "I feel _____ when you _____ because _____."

Examples

Regular	"You make me angry because you are always late"
"I" Statement	"I feel frustrated when you come home late because I stay awake worrying."

Regular	"You never call. You don't even care."
"I" Statement	"I feel hurt when you forget to call because it seems like you don't care."

Practice

Scenario	Your friend keeps cancelling plans at the last minute. Last weekend you were waiting for them at a restaurant when they called to tell you they would not be able to make it. You left feeling hurt.
"I" Statement	

Scenario	You are working on a project with a group and one member is not completing their tasks on time. You have repeatedly had to finish their work which has been very frustrating.
"I" Statement	

Scenario	A friend who borrows movies from you usually brings them back damaged. They want to borrow one again but you're feeling worried.
"I" Statement	

Reflections

Communication Skill

Using a technique called **reflection** can quickly help you become a better listener. When reflecting, you will repeat back what someone has just said to you, but in your own words. This shows that you didn't just hear the other person, but you are trying to understand them.

Reflecting what another person says can feel funny at first. You might think the other person will be annoyed at you for repeating them. However, when used correctly, reflections receive a positive reaction and drive a conversation forward. **Here's an example:**

Speaker: "I get so angry when you spend so much money without telling me. We're trying to save for a house!"

Listener: "We're working hard to save for a house, so it's really frustrating when it seems like I don't care."

✓ Quick Tips

The tone of voice you use for reflections is important. Use a tone that comes across as a statement, with a bit of uncertainty. Your goal is to express: "I think this is what you're telling me, but correct me if I'm wrong." Your reflections don't have to be perfect. If the other person corrects you, that's good! Now you have a better understanding of what they're trying to say.

Try to reflect emotions, even if the person you're listening to didn't clearly describe them. You may be able to pick up on how they feel by their tone of voice or body language.

Switch up your phrasing, or your reflections *will* start to sound forced. Try some of these:

- "I hear you saying that..."
- "It sounds like you feel..."
- "You're telling me that..."

Focus on reflecting the main point. Don't worry too much about all the little details, especially if the speaker had a lot to say!

Reflections

Communication Skill

Practice

"I was in a bad mood yesterday because work has been so stressful. I just can't keep up with everything I have to do."

Reflection:

"I feel like I'm doing all of the work around the house. I need you to help me clean and do the dishes more often."

Reflection:

"I've been worried when you don't answer your phone. I always think something might've happened to you."

Reflection:

"I don't understand what she wants from me. First she says she wants one thing, then another."

Reflection:

Positive Active Responding (PAR) **HOPE Intervention 18-9**

This communication principle involves responding to your partner's triumphs or struggles. Each of you will respond to the other partner's personal triumph or experience of some positive experience – like a promotion at work – in a supportive, caring way and with active nonverbal and emotional expression. The objective is to help the partner savor the positive experience. Decide who will be the speaker and who will be the listener.

Step 1:

Speaker: Talk about a life dream, triumph or positive experience you have had in your life. The more personal and emotional, the better. Try to describe how you felt, what it meant to you, and what kind of impact it had on your life.

Step 2:

Listener: Keep responding to the speaker by asking for more information and expressing positive and encouraging feelings. After the speaker has “run down,” summarize what you think they said and what positive meaning it had for them. Ask the speaker if you really “got it?”

A typical summary might be something like, “You are very excited that your boss noticed your work. This is very important to you because you’ve been wondering whether she was just seeing the negative in your work, and now you feel much more encouraged that she is appreciating you.”

Switch roles.

Step 3: Reflect on what you have learned through the discussion.

- How did it feel to share your triumphs and have your partner keep asking for more information and expressing positive and encouraging feelings?
- Did you feel supported?
- Did you feel like your partner was listening and really valuing you?
- Is there a way to do this at home that would work for both of you?
- How might you maintain a healthy relationship by staying connected to each other's life dreams, triumphs and positive experiences?