

Fair Fighting Rules

Before you begin, ask yourself why you feel upset.

Are you angry because your partner left the mustard on the counter? Or are you angry because you feel like you're doing an uneven share of the housework, and this is just one more piece of evidence? Take time to think about your own feelings before starting an argument.

Discuss one topic at a time.

Don't let "You left dishes in the sink" turn into "You watch too much TV." Discussions that get off-topic are more likely to get heated, and less likely to solve the original problem. Choose one topic and stick to it.

No degrading language.

Discuss the issue, not the person. No put-downs, swearing, or name-calling. Degrading language is an attempt to express negative feelings while making sure your partner feels just as bad. Doing so leads to more character attacks while the original issue is forgotten.

Express your feelings with words.

"I feel hurt when you ignore my phone calls." "I feel scared when you yell." Structure your sentences as "I" statements ("I feel *emotion* when *event*") to express how you feel while taking responsibility for your emotions. However, starting with "I" does not give a license to ignore the other fair fighting rules.

Take turns speaking.

Give your full attention while your partner speaks. Avoid making corrections or thinking about what you want to say. Your only job is to understand their point of view, even if you disagree. If you find it difficult to not interrupt, try setting a timer allowing 1-2 minutes for each person to speak without interruption.

No stonewalling.

Sometimes, the easiest way to respond to an argument is to retreat into your shell and refuse to speak. This is called stonewalling. You might feel better temporarily, but the original issue will remain unresolved and your partner will feel more upset. If you absolutely cannot go on, tell your partner you need to take a time-out. Agree to resume the discussion later.

No yelling.

Yelling does not help anyone see your point of view. Instead, it sends the message that only your words matter. Even if yelling intimidates your partner into giving up, the underlying problem only grows worse.

Take a time-out if things get too heated.

In a perfect world, we would all follow these rules 100% of the time... but it just doesn't work like that. If an argument starts to become personal or heated, take a time-out. Agree on a time to come back and discuss the problem after everyone has cooled down.

Attempt to come to a compromise or an understanding.

There isn't always a perfect answer to an argument. Life is too messy for that. Do your best to come to a compromise (this means some give and take from both sides). If you can't come to a compromise, simply taking the time to understand your partner's perspective can help soothe negative feelings.

Conflict Resolution Wheel



Stress Management Tips

Keep in mind that stress isn't a bad thing.

Stress motivates us to work toward solving our problems. Reframing thoughts to view stress as an acceptable emotion, or as a tool, has been found to reduce many of the negative symptoms associated with it. The goal is to *manage* stress, not to eliminate it.

Talk about your problems, even if they won't be solved.

Talking about your stressors—even if you don't solve them—releases hormones in your body that reduce the negative feelings associated with stress. Time spent talking with friends and loved ones is valuable, even when you have a lot on your plate.

Prioritize your responsibilities.

Focus on completing quick tasks first. Having too many "to-dos" can be stressful, even if none of them are very big. Quickly knocking out the small tasks will clear up your mind to focus on larger responsibilities.

Focus on the basics.

Stress can start a harmful cycle where basic needs are neglected, which leads to more stress. Make a point to focus on your basic needs, such as eating well, keeping a healthy sleep schedule, exercising, and other forms of self-care.

Don't put all your eggs in one basket.

People who are overinvolved in one aspect of their life often struggle to deal with stress when that area is threatened. Balance your time and energy between several areas, such as your career, family, friendships, and personal hobbies.

Anger Management Skill Cards

