

Fair Fighting Rules

- 1 Ask yourself why you feel upset.** Are you angry because your partner left food out on the counter? Or because you feel like you're doing an uneven share of the housework, and this is just one more piece of evidence? Reflect on your feelings and the reasons behind them before starting a discussion.
- 2 Discuss one topic at a time.** Even though there might be multiple issues, stay on topic. Discussions that get off topic are more likely to get heated and less likely to solve the problem. Choose one issue and stick to it.
- 3 Focus on the problem, not the person.** Never use put-downs, swearing, or name-calling. Using degrading language or focusing on a person's shortcomings only serves to trigger defensiveness and distract from the actual problem.
- 4 Express your feelings with "I" statements.** Use this sentence: "I feel (emotion) when (event)." This lets you express how you feel while taking responsibility for your own emotions. "I feel hurt when you don't respond to my messages." "I feel scared when you raise your voice."
- 5 Take turns speaking.** Give your full attention to your partner while they're speaking. Avoid making corrections or thinking about what you want to say. Your job is to understand their point of view, even if you disagree. If you find it hard not to interrupt, set a timer to let each person speak uninterrupted for 1-2 minutes at a time.
- 6 No stonewalling.** *Stonewalling* means retreating into your shell in order to avoid an argument. This might feel better temporarily, but it only postpones a discussion that needs to happen. If you feel overwhelmed, tell your partner you need a time-out, and agree on when and where you'll resume the conversation.
- 7 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 in, the underlying problem only grows worse.
- 8 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.
- 9 Be willing to compromise.** There isn't always a perfect solution to life's problems. Do your best to come to a compromise, which means some give and take from both sides. If compromise is impossible, taking time to understand your partner's perspective can help soothe hurt feelings.