

# The Right Way to Fight

**FIGHTING FAIRLY MEANS YOU—AND YOUR RELATIONSHIP—WIN**

By #TEAMEBONY



I have yet to counsel a couple who hasn't had a disagreement over money, household chores, sex, parenting, employment or career issues, extended family, use of time or concerns regarding a partner's social life. Let's face it: No two people think or feel exactly alike. Disagreements are unavoidable and are a natural part of all relationships. That's why learning the art of fair fighting is essential to lasting love. Many people view fighting as bad and destructive. Think of fighting as an effort to negotiate differences between you so that you can both have what matters most. The trick is to do so in a manner that is mature and respectful.

Couples who are not skilled at the art of fair fighting often attempt to "win" by resorting to name-calling, character assaults and saying things that they later regret. But if either partner "wins," the relationship loses. Other couples avoid fighting by hiding their differences and authentic feelings. If you are unable to fight, it is impossible to bring your true self to the relationship. Managing conflict constructively can help you to gain closeness through cooperating, problem solving together and gaining greater insight into each other's perspective. Here are some tips to share with your sweetie before the next issue comes up between you:

**1** Make an appointment to address the concern. Don't blurt out issues when you are rushed for time; however, avoid waiting longer than 72 hours because stockpiling grievances can result in an outpouring of every slight since you first met!

**2** Agree that either partner can request a time-out. If you are losing your temper, take 15 minutes to a half hour to calm down. Get a cold nonalcoholic beverage, or put some water on your face.

**3** Don't sweat the small stuff. Label your grievances on a scale of one to 10, with 10 being things that are potential deal breakers. Don't treat [a small issue] as if it could end the relationship.

**4** Honor the 50/50 Rule. Agree to take turns talking 50 percent of the time and listening for 50 percent of the time. Truly listening means you are not using that time to plan a rebuttal. Each of you should repeat your honey's point until he or she is satisfied that he or she's been understood.

- 5 Stay focused.** Don't bring up topics that have nothing to do with the issue at hand. Identify and articulate your feelings so you can then make specific requests for your unmet needs.
- 6 Maintain goodwill.** Focus jointly on finding solutions instead of assigning blame.
- 7 Touch each other when the topics are touchy.** Face each other and hold hands while discussing difficult topics. Maintaining eye and body contact reminds each person that (s)he is speaking to the person s(he) loves.
- 8 Never threaten to leave!** Partners sometimes repeat threats to break up or to divorce as ways of disarming a mate and derailing needed discussions. Don't go there! You'll erode your mate's confidence in your commitment to the relationship and further exacerbate your problems.
- 9 Don't use words as a weapon.** Hurtful words remain with your mate and cause wounds that are soul deep. If you intentionally injure your mate, (s)he will no longer feel emotionally safe and will likely build walls that block intimacy and vulnerability.
- 10 Avoid yelling or name-calling.** Constructive conflict resolution cannot occur in an environment that is disrespectful and hostile.
- 11 Say "I'm sorry."** Admitting you're wrong goes a long way toward healing a wounded spirit.
- 12 End the fight right.** Check in with each other to make sure that you both got everything off your chests. Often the most important feelings are withheld until the end—especially if the person feels shame or guilt.

What's your beef?  
Study shows it's the  
little things that lead  
to big arguments.

Think you're the only couple in a turf war over the TV remote? Think again. A study of 3,000 couples sponsored by Esure.com, a U.K. insurer, found that silly squabbles account for a huge part of what averages out to be 2,455 quarrels per year! But many of the conflicts are around critical issues as well. Among the top 10 tiffs, bickering over the budget actually made the list three times, with "overspending" (No. 2), "money" (No. 3) and "the bills" (No. 6) collectively accounting for 315 arguments each year. Other big concerns had to do with a partner not listening, failing to pull his or her weight around the house, snoring or driving with a lead foot. How many of the following issues have you two had?

Number of Lovers' Quarrels This Year:

87 - When to have sex

112 - One of you not listening

90 - The house is dirty

79 - Swearing in front of the children

108 - Money or lack thereof

92 - What to eat for dinner

69 - Not saying "I love you" enough

88- Disciplining the children

82 - Getting home late from work

84 - Taking each other for granted