

# Let's Talk: Fighting fair

***Presenter – Lynn Borteck, Clinical Counselor***

Hi, my name is Lynn. Let's talk about fair fighting in relationships. First of all, what is a fight? A fight is really just a disagreement. Some kind of a conflict. Something where you and your partner don't agree. But it's also an opportunity to grow and to learn. And honestly, some people think that in a loving relationship, you shouldn't have fights. Really the opposite is true. It's not normal to be in close contact with someone a lot, and not have disagreements. So fighting is normal. Disagreeing is normal in relationships.

## Fighting fair can be healthy in relationships

Another reason why fighting is important, is because fighting or disagreeing gives you a chance to get to know the other person better. It also gives you a chance to let the person get to know you better. Let them know what your needs are. And also maybe give them some hints on how to meet those needs. And finally, it's a way to resolve conflict. But keep in mind, if you know a couple, or if you're a couple where there are no disagreements, that doesn't mean that there's no conflict, that means that there's no communication.

Why is it important to learn to fight fair? Well, since we now know that fighting and disagreeing are normal, it's great to learn how to fight fair, so that your fights can be productive. Because productive fights can actually improve your relationship. Whereas destructive fights or unfair fighting, can lead to destructive consequences.

## Things to avoid

So let's talk about some things that you shouldn't do, if you're trying to fight fair. Number one, if you're having a disagreement about something, that's what that fight is about. It's not about all the things that the person did, last week, last month or last year. It's only about that one thing. That's an important part of fair fighting. Number two, is that you're fighting in order to resolve, or to negotiate on something. It's not about winning. You need to remember to talk to each other, rather than shouting over each other. You don't want to accuse people. You don't want to be pointing and being nasty like that. And avoid using the words "always" or "never." As in, you always do blah blah blah. Or you never do blah blah blah. 'Cause that's really putting someone in a corner. And honestly, none of us always or never anything. So try to avoid always or never, and be more specific. Like, yesterday when you said blank, it made me feel blank.

A few other things to stay away from are yelling and name-calling. They just don't do anything positive in trying to resolve a conflict. And of course I'm going to mention this, but I hope you know there is no pushing, no shoving, no throwing things or any other kind of physical violence. Because safety is always so important in any relationship. You don't want to feel that if you're going to disagree with someone, you're putting yourself in danger. So never any kind of physical violence.

## Tips for fighting fair

So now let's switch to some things that you can do to fight more fairly. Number one, when two people sit down to talk about something that they don't agree on, one person should talk at a time. The other person is the listener. And listening is a really hard skill. You can't listen and be thinking about how you're going to defend yourself against whatever the person is saying. You really need to listen to understand how the other person thinks and feels. It's also important to go after what the issue is, rather than attacking the person. And finally, it's important to try to stick to "I" messages. Rather than accusing a person by saying a lot of "you you you." Try to stick to "I" messages. So for instance, you would say, "I really feel badly when [fill in the blank]," as opposed to, "You do this" and "You do that."

## Be ready to fight fair

A few final things to do when you're trying to fight fair: be open - be ready to listen. If you're not open and ready to listen, it's not the right time to have a fair fight. You have to be ready to hear things that will make you react, make you feel a certain way. Fair criticism is fair. And finally, if things become heated; if you try to sit down and have a fair fight, and you really have good intentions, but if things become heated, it's really okay to stop the discussion, and each take a time out and just separate yourselves until you're ready to go back together in a constructive way. So to summarize, fighting fair is really a conflict resolution method, and it's a good one. If you avoid fights in your relationship, it's not going to be positive for your relationship, because fighting and learning more about the other person and negotiating things all will improve your relationships. Good luck!

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