



Thousand Waves
Martial Arts & Self-Defense Center, NFP

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Fair fighting: ground rules

Remain calm. Try not to overreact to difficult situations. By remaining calm it is more likely that others will consider your viewpoint.

Express feelings in words, not actions. If you start to feel so angry or upset that you feel you may lose control, take a "time out" and do something to help yourself feel calm: take a walk, do some deep breathing, play with the dog, write in your journal- whatever works for you.

Be specific about what is bothering you. Vague complaints are hard to work on.

Deal with only one issue at a time. Don't introduce other topics until each is fully discussed. This avoids the "kitchen sink" effect where people throw in all their complaints while not allowing anything to be resolved.

No hitting below the belt. Attacking areas of personal sensitivity creates an atmosphere of distrust, anger, and vulnerability.

Avoid accusations. Accusations will lead others to focus on defending themselves rather than on understanding you. Instead, talk about how someone's actions made you feel.

Try not to generalize. Avoid words like "never" or "always." Such generalizations are usually inaccurate and will heighten tensions.

Avoid make believe. Exaggerating or inventing a complaint - or your feelings about it - will prevent the real issues from surfacing. Stick with the facts and your honest feelings.

Don't stockpile. Storing up lots of grievances and hurt feelings over time is counterproductive. It's almost impossible to deal with numerous old problems for which recollections may differ. Try to deal with problems as they arise.

Avoid clamming up. Positive results can only be attained with two-way communication. When one person becomes silent and stops responding to the other, frustration and anger can result. However, if you feel yourself getting overwhelmed or shutting down, you may need to take a break from the discussion. Just let your partner know you will return to the conversation as soon as you are able and then don't forget to follow-up.

Establish common ground rules. You may even want to ask your partner-in-conflict to read and discuss this information with you. When both people accept positive common ground rules for managing a conflict, resolution becomes much more likely.



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Fair fighting: step by step...

1. Before you begin, ask yourself, "What exactly is bothering me? What do I want the other person to do or not do? Are my feelings in proportion to the issue?"
2. Know what your goals are before you begin. What are the possible outcomes that could be acceptable to you?
3. Remember that the idea is not to win but to come to a mutually satisfying solution to the problem.
4. Set a time for a discussion with your partner-in-conflict. It should be as soon as possible but agreeable to both persons. Springing a conversation on someone when they are unprepared may leave them feeling like they have to fend off an attack. If you encounter resistance to setting a time, try to help the other person see that the problem is important to you.
5. State the problem clearly. At first, try to stick to the facts; then, once you've stated the facts, state your feelings. Use "I" messages to describe feelings of anger, hurt, or disappointment. Avoid "you" messages such as, "you make me angry..."; instead, try something like, "I feel angry when you...."
6. Invite the other person to share his or her point of view. Be careful not to interrupt, and genuinely try to hear his or her concerns and feelings. Try to restate what you heard in a way that lets your partner know you fully understood, and ask your partner to do the same for you.
7. Try to take the other's perspective; that is, try to see the problem through his or her eyes. The opposing viewpoint can make sense to you, even if you don't agree with it.
8. Propose specific solutions, and invite the other person to propose solutions, too.
9. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each proposal.
10. Be willing to compromise. Allowing the other person only one option will make it difficult to resolve the concern. When you reach an agreement on a way forward, celebrate! Decide together on a time to check-in, discuss how things are working, and make changes to your agreement if necessary. If no solution has been reached regarding the original problem, schedule a time to revisit the issue and continue the discussion.