

How to Fight Fair

by John Thurman M.Div., M.A., LPCC

Couples fight! The key to any fight is to maintain control. You do not have the right to be immature, childish or abusive. If you do have legitimate feelings and issues, you are entitled to give a reasonable voice to those feelings in a constructive way. (That includes not being self-righteous or taking yourself too seriously.) Proverbs 29:11, "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man holds it back."

1. **Take it private and keep it private.** Fighting in front of your kids is nothing short of child abuse. It can and will scar them emotionally and spiritually all because you don't have the self-control to keep it together until you can talk about it privately. *It also not advisable to share information about your fights with family and friends – the information always gets twisted and enhanced.* Proverbs 15:18, "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger pacifies contention."

2. **Deal with the issue at hand! Keep it relevant! Stay on task!** Focus on the issues rather than attacking each other. Don't bring up old issues or grudges when they are not a part of the solution. Put boundaries around the subject so it won't turn into a free for all. Limit the discussion to the one issue at the center of the conflict.

3. **Stay in the room emotionally, keep it real.** Deal with the issues not with symptoms. Tell your spouse what is bothering you. Focus on the issue rather than the attack! Proverbs 11:2, "He who belittles his neighbor lacks sense."

4. **Eliminate "You never," "You always."** These phrases *will always* lead to some place you really don't want to go.

5. **Avoid character assassination.** Stay focused on the issue rather than ripping into your spouse's personality, family, or past.

6. **Don't "mind read!"** If you are not sure what your partner meant by something they said, ask for clarification.

7. **Stay on task!** The mission is to resolve to conflict and come out with a "win-win" not a "I win you loose outcome."

8. **Be proportional in your intensity.** You don't kill a fly with a cannon. There are basically only two types of problems people have – solvable and unsolvable (or not solvable right now.) Everything that you disagree on is not an earth shattering issue. Remember, you don't have to get mad and upset every time you have a cause to be.

9. **Commit yourself to openness, honesty and acceptance.** This will help you relax, listen and give feedback.

10. **Allow yourself and your partner to retreat with dignity.** How a fight ends is crucial. Recognize when an olive branch is being offered to you (it might be disguised as an apology or a joke), and give each other a face-saving way out of the disagreement.

11. **Pray privately and together about each conflict before discussing it.** Prayer can never hurt any situation.