

# Fair Argument Rules

The following are important points to keep in mind about respectful communication and conflict resolution...The techniques are presented, however, with a word of caution: An abusive partner who has not sought professional help, who does not take responsibility, and who is not committed to recovery may view these techniques as ways to manipulate and control. You may, however, use them to assess your relationship, or use them as goals in your present or future relationships.

**MAKE AN "APPOINTMENT" TO DISCUSS THE PROBLEM** Argue by mutual consent. Agree upon a time, place, and duration for the discussion. Don't insist on an argument when one of you can't handle this type of strain.

**ARGUE FAIR** Observe the rules you set. No changing rules without mutual agreement. Avoid insults. In your lives together you discover each other's sensitive areas. Choose not to throw them at each other or use them as weapons.

**NO VIOLENCE** Don't call each other names. Don't insult each other's families. Don't threaten your partner or try to intimidate them with displays of violence. You have the right to say how you feel; however you do not have the right to do it in an abusive way i.e., by using harsh language or physical abuse. Physical and verbal violence violates all of the rules for arguing by mutual consent. Violence and abuse only result in fear, mistrust, avoiding sexual contact, lowered self-esteem, and the gradual loss of love for the partner.

**USE "I" LANGUAGE** "I" language is honest, direct, and it empowers you. It also reduces the defensiveness caused when you say, "You did this and you did that" to your partner. "I" messages are always legitimate. For example: "I feel hurt because;" or "I feel betrayed when;" or "I really get angry when;" or "I hate it when;" or "I feel afraid when."

**STICK TO THE PRESENT** Avoid bringing up past mistakes and faults about which you can do nothing.

**STICK TO THE SUBJECT** Limit the argument to one particular subject. Avoid throwing every other problem into it. Talk about other problems at another time.

**LISTEN TO YOUR PARTNER** Become more aware of what the other person may be feeling by looking for verbal and non-verb cues. Check out your understanding of what your partner has said by repeating what you heard. In order for communication to be effective, both parties must listen to what the other person is saying. Accept your partner's right to his/her feelings

**STATE YOUR FEELINGS** Try to identify what you are feeling. Name the feeling, and then describe it for your partner. (Try practicing this if it is difficult for you.) Practice it in the good times as well!

**STAY AWAY FROM CERTAIN PHRASES** Avoid certain "no-no" words and phrases such as, "You never;" "I told you so;" "You always;" "I don't want to discuss it;" "When will you ever learn;" and "How many times do I have to tell you?"

## **OWN RESPONSIBILITY AND BE HONEST ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS**

Don't be afraid to admit you were wrong (when you were). Do remember to say, "I need you;" "Please help me;" "Thank you;" and "I love you." Apologize when it is warranted...but be careful that you aren't the only one who apologizes. Remember that admitting mistakes and making amends is a two way street when both partners care about the relationship.

## **DISCUSS SPECIFIC ACTIONS**

Ask for what you want. Be specific. Give reasons for your actions. Ask your partner for what he/she wants. Get details. Negotiate in good faith. Be willing to compromise. If somebody has to "win" the argument, then somebody else has to "lose" it. What have you "won" if you have just lost good communication with your partner in life? Also, approach conflict as a problem you both have and must solve together.

## **MAKE NON-VIOLENCE A MUTUAL GOAL IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP**

Remember, no single issue is as important as your, overall goal of remaining non-violent and non-abusive in your relationship. Hurting your partner with blows or hurtful words always builds resentment and erodes the relationship. A fight between partners has the purpose of clearing the air and of expressing deep feelings in order to build a unified life. Keep your goal in mind - the goal of sharing your lives with each other.

## **DON'T QUIT; WORK IT OUT**

Agree to work things out. Bring the fight to a mutual conclusion; otherwise, it will just recur. If necessary, negotiate for a compromise. A compromise means finding another option which you can both agree on so that neither of you feel like you are "sacrificing" anything. Make your agreements clear by repeating them and writing them down.

### *Some more helpful hints....*

#### *16 Rules for Conflict Resolution*

- 1. Negotiate from the Adult position.*
- 2. Avoid ultimatums.*
- 3. If one loses, both lose.*
- 4. Say what you really mean (not generalities)!*
- 5. Avoid accusations and attacks.*
- 6. Own your own feelings first (" I " statements).*
- 7. Always check out your perceptions.*
- 8. State your wishes and requests clearly and directly.*
- 9. Never use sex to smooth over a disagreement.*
- 10. Repeat the message you think you received.*
- 11. Refuse to fight dirty (name-calling, threatening, etc.).*
- 12. Resist giving the silent treatment.*
- 13. Focus on the issue and focus on the present.*
- 14. Call " Time out " if you are too upset*
- 15. Use humor and comic relief.*
- 16. Always go for closure*