



# LOVE notes

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## Fighting in a Way That's Fair

Contributions by Robert J. Fetsch, Ph.D.

Conflict is a normal part of all relationships, even though for many of us, it isn't comfortable. Most people like to think of themselves as "lovers rather than fighters," trying to sidestep conflicts whenever possible. But since there is no such thing as a perfect relationship, you can expect that you're going to experience conflict. This goes for all relationships. Disagreements happen, and how you handle those differences of opinion is key to the health of your relationship.

Relationship educators, therapists and researchers have developed guidelines or "rules" for fair fighting based on effective communication skills. These fair fighting rules are designed to help each person respectfully voice his or her concerns and then work together to solve the problem.

### Are you a Fair Fighter?

Check out these guidelines adapted from Robert Fetsch, Ph.D. and Beryl Jacobson at Colorado State University to see how you're doing.

- Work to remain calm and logical during disagreements.
- Don't fight to win. When one wins and one loses in a valued relationship, both of you lose. The goal is to solve the problem with a solution both of you can live with.
- Respect and value yourself and your partner.

- Pick your battles. Decide how much energy you are willing to invest in this particular problem. Some people end up in a fifty-dollar disagreement over a five-dollar problem.
- Get focused. Take time to figure out your true thoughts and feelings about the issue before you talk about it.
- Learn to compromise.
- Let your *yes* mean *yes* and your *no* mean *no*.
- Pick a time to talk that's convenient for both of you. Avoid mealtime, just coming in the door from work, or in front of others, especially children.
- Stick to one issue at a time. Avoid the temptation to lump several concerns into the same discussion. Some people refer to this as throwing in everything but the kitchen sink!
- Ask for and give feedback to make sure you're hearing each other accurately. "It sounds like you're irritated because I bring work home from the office. Right?"
- Check out your impressions. "I see a scowl on your face that makes me think you're angry. Are you?"
- Respect belt-lines. Don't hit below the belt

by attacking your partner's tender spots and personal vulnerabilities.

- Ask for what you want. "What I want from you is a commitment to follow the budget for six months." Also ask your partner, "What do you want from me?"
- Stay in the here and now. Avoid statements like, "You couldn't handle money when we met, and you still can't."
- Focus on the positive. "Thank you for listening to me."
- Have a time-out rule. If either of you is starting to feel upset, agree to table the discussion until you can calm down. Then get back to it.
- Never use violence to get your way. Hitting, punching, kicking, or slapping is NEVER acceptable behavior. If you do this as an adult it is a crime.
- Let go. Once you've reached a solution and put it into action, drop it. Don't keep bringing up the discussion or hold on to your anger. Forgive and forget is a good motto.

More Information: [www.alabamamarriage.org](http://www.alabamamarriage.org)

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