

# Fighting Fair

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Shakespeare's oft-quoted line, "All's fair in love and war," may be true, but it shouldn't be interpreted as license to do whatever we want—at least not if having a happy marriage is our goal.

If you want to resolve your marital problems in a healthy way, you will need to establish and follow some guidelines for resolving those differences. This could be called fighting fair.

Whenever a man and woman join together in matrimony, differences will invariably arise, but like two coaches, two business heads, or two civic leaders, although their individual views may differ, they still have the same goal, which is to strengthen their organization.

Likewise, in marriage, when disagreements arise, the end goal of spouses should be to resolve their differences in a way that will strengthen their union. Yes, it can be challenging at times, but that's true of every worthy endeavor in life. No one ever rises to the top of their career or organization without a committed effort to get there. We make this effort because we know that in the end it will have been worth it. If both spouses can agree that their goal is a happy marriage, the following will help resolve the inevitable disagreements when they arise.

First, we should recognize that the healthy resolution of problems requires both spouses. One person alone can't do it. You could liken it to two people carrying a stone; if one side lets go, the rock will fall. The process has to involve both spouses, otherwise the problems will fester.

Secondly, couples should allow their disagreements to degenerate into personal attacks on each other. Criticisms, insults, "the silent treatment" and other ploys designed to hurt the other person will only antagonize the situation and drive you further apart.

Third, your disagreements should remain private. Inviting others into your personal affairs should be done only by mutual consent and with both spouses present. Not having your spouse there to present his or her views when you present yours is almost guaranteed to create more divisiveness and aggravate your situation further. This is just common decency. Nobody wants their dirty laundry aired before others, and it becomes especially hurtful when intimate details of our personal lives are revealed to others by someone we love.

Finally, it's important that spouses honor not just the ground rules they agree upon, but the intent of those rules as well. For instance, if one of the

ground rules is that you not shout at each other, and instead of shouting, one of you stomps out of an argument in anger, it's clear that the rule—showing respect for each other's opinion—has been violated.

Once the basic ground rules are agreed upon, the manner in which couples resolve their problems is almost limitless, because however they approach their problems, their interactions will be based on courtesy, respect and a mutual desire to fortify the relationship. .

One couple made it a rule that when things got heated to go for a walk and avoid looking at each other as they talked things out. "One of the things that attracted me to my wife when we met was the fact that she was a mediation attorney," said the husband. "Before we married, she laid out plan to help us resolve our differences and those ground rules have kept our marriage strong for 14 years!"

A second couple agreed that they would never, under any circumstances, divorce. That pact formed an umbrella of security under which they could talk openly about their disagreements, knowing that no matter how much they disagreed, the marriage itself was safe.

Fighting isn't necessarily bad. If done properly, it can actually strengthen the marriage by identifying a couple's weak spots and helping them work out their differences. And the longer their history of successful resolutions, the greater will be their chances of resolving the next one when it comes along.

On the other hand, if you are not willing to fight fairly, the better solution may be to simply walk away. The end result will likely be the same, and you will have saved yourself a lot of grief in the process.