



Couples Guide to 'Fair Fighting'

Every couple knows that relationships include disagreements. It's essential for every couple to learn how to have exchanges and disagreements that are constructive rather than destructive. Research shows that couples who stay together use conflict as a chance to strengthen their relationship and connect with each other.

Provided as a community service by PSI, Bangkok's professional and experienced group of expatriate mental health professionals. PSI is located in a private and peaceful setting in the city center.

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- 1. Engage!:** Silence builds distance and isolation, which kill relationships. Leading parallel but disengaged lives is one of the pathways to relationship breakdown. In satisfying relationships, both partners are participating in the relationship.
- 2. Commit to Fighting Fair:** Understand that when you have a fight, the point is to resolve your concern **AND** to improve the relationship. If one of you walks away from a fight feeling like a loser, then the relationship is the real loser. Commit to taking your fights seriously for both of you. Avoiding fighting when hungry, tired, late at night or when one of you has become overly angry (use time-outs). Establish ground rules that you both accept and agree to stick with.
- 3. No name calling or hitting below the belt:** Count to ten. Try not to take it personally. Let your first response be an attempt to understand. There are many strategies, but **whatever you do— avoid the low road**. Do not call your partner or their ideas 'stupid,' 'useless,' or something worse. Snide remarks, put-downs, sarcasm— it's all good- if you want to be alone. If you're angry, say so, but don't let your anger get the better of you and erode the affection in your relationship.
- 4. Stick to a specific topic:** Stay focused and specific. Discuss the issue that is at hand today. Try not to bring in examples from the past that prove how right you are. Don't say 'always' & 'never'- almost nothing is true all/none of the time.
- 5. Take responsibility for your needs by making suggestions or requests:** Be ready to do more than complain. Your partner is not a mind reader, and each of us needs to ask for what we want. Make specific suggestions or requests. Invite your partner to make suggestions. Discuss these ideas and be ready to compromise.
- 6. Take responsibility for your mistakes:** When you've hurt the other person, apologize (for example, when you fight dirty, and don't follow the rules you two agreed on). When they hurt you, let them know.
- 7. Reconnect with humor and love:** Find some nice way to end the discussion, with touch, compassion or humor. Try to remember that you have made a commitment to each other that requires work and understanding.