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FAIR FIGHTING

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Remember: Constructive conflict resolution takes time. Schedule plenty of time for those conflicts which keep coming up. A time limit is useful (e.g. 1/2 hr.) and if you haven't reached an agreement after that period of time, come back to the problem in your next session at home.

The most important thing to remember is that in fair fighting you both begin the process with a Win-Win Attitude. This means you must both be willing to compromise.

Steps to Fair Fighting

1. The person who has the problem is responsible for bringing it up as soon as is possible. Before you bring the problem up, think it through in your own mind.
2. State the problem to your partner as clearly and concretely as possible. Use the following format:
I am feeling (e.g., angry) because of (e.g., the way you put me down at your parent's).
3. It is important that you both understand the problem being brought up. The partner who is on the receiving end should reflect back what was said using the following format:
I hear you saying you _____ because of _____.
After reflecting back what was said, ask clarifying questions so you know exactly what your partner meant. For example, "Describe", "Tell me", "What is it that upsets you".
4. When both partners agree on what is being said, the first partner may proceed.
5. The partner who brings up the problem should take responsibility for offering a possible solution in terms of changes both can make. (e.g.,
I can make sure you know what I want. I would like to suggest you _____.)
6. This solution can be discussed and then the other partner may offer a counter-proposal. Again, the solution should involve changes **both** can make.
7. Discuss several options until you agree that one proposal is most workable (not right or wrong, but workable).

Steps to Fair Fighting (cont.)

8. Once you have agreed on an idea, proceed to talk about how you will put it into action. This means being able to clearly answer the question: who will do what, when, and how.
9. Now that everything has been worked out, think about what could happen to undermine it. Each person can think of how they might sabotage the agreement.
10. Working through a conflict stirs up a lot of feelings and means you had to give up something. Congratulate each other for the hard work and willingness to compromise. Reaffirm your relationship in as many ways as possible. You have good reason to celebrate.
11. Agree to come back to this problem after some specific period of time to reassess how the agreement is working. You may need to change it or fine tune part of it.

FAIR FIGHTING RULES

1. Be specific when you introduce a gripe.
2. Don't just complain, no matter how specifically; ask for a reasonable change that will relieve one gripe.
3. Confine yourself to one issue at a time. Otherwise, without professional guidance, you may skip back and forth, evading the hard ones.
4. Always consider compromise. Remember, your partner's view of reality may be just as real as yours, even though you may differ. There are not many totally objective realities.
5. Do not allow counter-demands to enter the picture until the original demands are clearly understood, and there has been clear-cut response to them.
6. Never assume that you know what your partner is thinking until you have checked out the assumption in plain language; or assume or predict how he will react, what he will accept or reject.
7. Never put labels on a partner. Call him neither a coward, nor a neurotic, nor a child. If you really believed that he/she was incompetent or suffered from some basic flaw, you probably would not be with him/her. Do not make sweeping, labeling judgments about his/her feelings, especially about whether or not they are real or important.
8. Sarcasm is dirty fighting.
9. Forget the past and stay with the here-and-now. What either of you did last year or month or that morning is not as important as what you are doing and feeling now. And the changes you ask cannot possibly be retroactive. Hurts, grievances, and irritations should be brought up at the very earliest moment, or the partner has the right to suspect that they may have been saved carefully as weapons.
10. Meditate. Take time to consult your real thoughts and feelings before speaking. Your surface reactions may mask something deeper and more important. Don't be afraid to ask your partner for some time to think.