

### **Effective Communicating & Fair-Fighting Guidelines**

1. *Own Your Response.* Use "I-language" instead of falling back on the "make-feel" myth. For example, say, "I feel worried and scared when you drink so much beer" instead of, "your drinking is making me crazy."
2. *Be Specific.* Avoid using extreme or global language like "always," "never," "everyone." Instead, use more modifying or tentative statements, "sometimes," "often," or "maybe." Avoid character assassination. Talk about incidents rather than personality traits.
3. *One At A Time.* Solve one problem at a time, stick to the present situation and stay focused.
4. *Listen As Much As You Talk.* Make reflective or clarifying statements in order to show that you understand the other's position. Seek information as much as you give your opinion.
5. *Avoid Intention Reading (AKA- Mind Reading).* Get "reality checks" instead of acting on assumptions of the other person's intentions or motives. "I think you're afraid of letting me have space because you're afraid of losing me. Is that right?" Instead of "You just want me to live a miserable life, held hostage in this disaster you call a relationship."
6. *Avoid Arguing Reactively.* Stay calm, keep control of your behavior and as much as possible speak in a neutral tone of voice. Give yourself the luxury of a "time-out" to rethink your position and make effective decisions.
7. *Admit Your Part Of The Problem.* Ongoing conflicts are like dances, "It takes two to tango." Focus on identifying your own dance steps that keep a conflict going then learn a new step.
8. *Ask Yourself, "Whose Problems Is This?"* Avoid taking too much responsibility for another's behavior. In most cases, allow others to experience the consequences of their behavior and thinking instead of needlessly protecting them.

9. Argue Sober. Avoid discussing important issues with any individual who is under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
10. Sleep On It. Sometimes it is okay to "let the sun go down on your anger." Agree to discuss "hot" topics at a time when each person is rested and alert. A good night's rest can facilitate a refreshed perspective. However, it's important not to collude with your partner to avoid the problem the next day.
11. Agree To Disagree. Know that many arguments are about opinions, not facts, or at least opinions about facts. Be tolerant of different opinions and perspectives.
12. Avoid Power Struggles. Power struggles are about me trying to get you to do, be, or think like me so that I'll get what I want or will feel more comfortable. Focus on resolving the power struggle instead of getting caught up in big arguments over "little things."
13. Declare A Cease Fire. If you are at an impasse, then it's time to declare a cease fire. Carefully learn the other person's perspective and wishes. Thoughtfully examine and express your own. Then consider compromise, creative alternatives, going along or sticking to your guns. Take your time.
14. Focus On What's Right. Acknowledge the accuracy of the other person's statements instead of focusing on how they are "wrong."
15. Clarify Your Wants. Realize that most of what are called "needs" are really "wants". You **need** to breathe air, drink water, etc. Ask for what you want without making demands.
16. It Takes Time. Realize that effective problem solving takes time, effort and practice. Tolerate disappointing results and use feedback to help improve your skills.
17. Ask For Help. Be willing to get help from a neutral, third person if you are in a stuck or deteriorating relationship. Friends, family members, ministers or counselors can often provide assistance to help you get things back on track.

### **Unfair Fighting / Mistakes In Communicating**

1. "You Make Me Feel" Myth.
2. Globalization or extreme language.
3. "Gunnysacking" – Saving all your gripes and using them all at once.
4. Listening means I agree.
5. Mind reading / intention reading.
6. Speaking loudly or yelling helps your partner hear better.
7. It's all your fault (& I had no part in the problem).
8. For your own good... (overprotection).
9. A drink will take the edge off (and help us communicate).
10. Marathon arguing.
11. Everyone things / processes / values similarly.
12. I win-you lose (what were we talking about?)
13. Fight until the finished (without a break).
14. Lawyering / philosopher – pick apart flaws in arguing (what were we talking about?)
15. "I need..." myth (as opposed to "I want...").
16. Expecting immediate change / results. Unrealistic expectations for change.
17. Doing it alone – not seeking assistance from a neutral 3<sup>rd</sup> party.