



How to Fight Fair

How you argue — especially how you end an argument — can determine the long-term success or failure of your relationship.

A primary requirement for any fight is to maintain control. You do not have the license to be childish, abusive or immature. If you have legitimate feelings, you are entitled to give a reasonable voice to those feelings in a constructive way. (That includes not being self-righteous or taking yourself too seriously.)

"Disagreements are going to occur," says Dr. Phil. "The question is, do you go into it with a spirit of looking for resolution or do you go into it with a spirit of getting even, vengeance, control? You'll never win if you do that. If you make your relationship a competition, that means your spouse has to lose in order for you to win. It's not a competition, it's a partnership."

Here are Dr. Phil's specific rules for fighting fair.

- **Take it private and keep it private.**

Fighting in front of your children is nothing short of child abuse. It can and will scar them emotionally — all because you don't have the self-control to contain yourself until you can talk privately.

- **Keep it relevant.**

Don't bring up old grudges or sore points when they don't belong in a particular argument. Put boundaries around the subject matter so that a fight doesn't deteriorate into a free-for-all.

- **Keep it real.**

Deal with the issue at hand, not with a symptom of the problem. Get real about what is bothering you, or you will come away from the exchange even more frustrated.

- **Avoid character assassination.**

Stay focused on the issue, rather than deteriorating to the point of attacking your partner personally. Don't let the fight degenerate into name-calling.

- **Remain task-oriented.**

Know what you want going into the disagreement. If you don't have a goal in mind, you won't know when you've achieved it.

- **Allow for your partner to retreat with dignity.**

How an argument ends is crucial. Recognize when an olive branch is being extended to you — perhaps in the form of an apology or a joke — and give your partner a face-saving way out of the disagreement.

- **Be proportional in your intensity.**

Every single thing you disagree about is not an earth-shattering event or issue. You do not have to get mad every time you have a right to be.

- **There's a time limit.**

Arguments should be temporary, so don't let them get out of hand. Don't allow the ugliness of an argument to stretch on indefinitely.