

A Fair Fight

With Valentine's Day looming, romance is in the air. While we like a bouquet of roses as much as the next person, the pop-culture view of an ideal relationship is usually unrealistic and can lead to disappointment. The real secret to successful, long-lasting relationships may have less to do with flowers and more to do with how well you fight.

Learning how to resolve conflict is a vital life skill that is not just important in dealing with a life partner, it also keeps things healthy with your boss, your friends, your colleagues and your kids. In any marriage, partnership or friendship, it's not whether or not you will disagree, but *how* you disagree. Some conflict is inevitable. The real key lies in how you work through conflict and resolve it. Here are some good rules of thumb.

Don't let anger or resentment fester and build up. Put it on the table as soon as practical and get beyond it. Work out disagreements constructively.

Aim to resolve, not to win. Your goal shouldn't be to win an argument but to strengthen the relationship. Find alignment and mutual goals. Think about your partner's needs as well as your own. Negotiate and compromise.

Learn to listen. Don't assume you know what your partner feels or means – clarify using a feedback loop and rephrase what you hear. Avoid interrupting.

Give people the benefit of the doubt. Learn to separate the problem from the person.



Cultivate acceptance. Stop trying to change people. Thomas Merton said that, "The beginning of love is to let those we love be perfectly themselves, and not to twist them to fit our own image. Otherwise we love only the reflection of ourselves we find in them." While differences can be a source of conflict, they can also contribute to the chemistry in a relationship.

Don't hit below the belt. Don't accuse or exploit weaknesses or sensitivities. Keep respect in the forefront. Offer reassurance of continued regard.

It's not just about you. Try not to personalize what you hear and to listen for the other person's needs.

Stay in control. Use words not actions to express your feelings. If you feel your anger or emotions are getting out of hand, take a break.

Let go. Forgive. Don't hold grudges.

Your EAP has many resources on conflict resolution and resolving problems in relationships. Log on to the Member site or if you need one-to-one help with big or worrisome issues, call us 24/7.