

# 13 Fighting Rules for Couples

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1. **Have a clear understanding of why you are upset.** Take a moment to reflect on the core issue before initiating the conversation. Ask yourself: *What specifically upset me? Why does it matter to me?* When you identify the root of your feelings, it helps keep the discussion focused and prevents the argument from spiraling into unrelated topics.
2. **Take your thoughts through the Balanced Thinking Journal before approaching your partner.** The Balanced Thinking Journal is a tool designed to train your brain to avoid jumping to false negative assumptions, which can lead to unnecessary conflict. By walking through this process before addressing a concern, you ensure your approach is rational, balanced, and grounded in clarity. Find the Balance Thinking Journal on [www.guidingherlight.com](http://www.guidingherlight.com).
3. **Have the mindset of being on the same team.** Arguments with your partner shouldn't be approached as a "winning" or "losing" matter, they should be approached as resolving misunderstandings as a team. Remind yourself that your partner likely has good intentions and is not your adversary. Viewing the issue as a shared challenge encourages a cooperative and solution-oriented mindset. Approach your partner with compassion and the belief that the two of you can work together to find a resolution.
4. **Right Place Right Time.** Timing and setting are critical for productive communication. Avoid discussing sensitive topics when emotions are already high or external stressors could derail the conversation. Choose an ideal environment where both of you can focus on the discussion without distractions. For example, wait until you're both relaxed at home rather than raising the issue in public, over text, or during a social gathering.
5. **No degrading each other.** Name-calling, swearing, or belittling, damages trust and escalates conflict. Speak to your partner with respect, even if you're upset. Focus on criticizing the behavior or situation, not the person. For instance, say, "I feel frustrated when..." instead of making personal attacks. Respecting each other's dignity ensures the conversation remains constructive.
6. **No yelling or raising your voice.** Yelling causes defensiveness and shuts down meaningful communication. It can also escalate tension unnecessarily. Speak calmly to maintain an ideal space for healthy discussion. If you feel your voice rising, pause, take a deep breath, and refocus on expressing yourself without anger.
7. **Be conscious of how you express your feelings.** Express your feelings with sentences instead of insults or outbursts. Frame your feelings in a way that encourages understanding rather than blame. Use "I" statements, such as, "I feel hurt when..." instead of "You always..." Avoid speaking in an accusatory way toward your partner. Take time to think before you speak, ensuring your words reflect your intentions clearly and respectfully.
8. **Stay on topic.** Avoid bringing up past grievances or unrelated issues. Stick to the specific problem at hand and resist the temptation to make it a laundry list of complaints. For example, if you're upset about a missed date night, focus on that, rather than linking it to other past disappointments. Staying focused ensures the argument stays on track toward a resolution and doesn't spiral out of control.
9. **Do not interrupt each other.** Respect your partner's opportunity to express themselves fully before responding. Active listening shows that you value their perspective. If you feel tempted to interrupt, remind yourself that you'll have your turn to speak. Taking turns promotes mutual understanding and prevents the conversation from feeling one-sided.
10. **Take a time out if necessary.** If emotions escalate, it's okay to pause the conversation and take a time out. Calmly say, "I need some time to process this," and agree to revisit the discussion after a break. Use this time to reflect and calm down rather than ruminating on your anger. If your partner asks for space, respect their need to regroup, and don't follow them or pressure them to continue the argument prematurely.
11. **Always attempt to reach mutual understanding.** Sometimes couples can't stop fighting because they are committed to misunderstanding each other. The goal of any disagreement should be to understand each other better and find a resolution that works for both parties. Acknowledge your partner's feelings and strive for clarity. Sometimes, agreeing to compromise or simply validating their perspective can help resolve the tension. Keep the focus on achieving unity, not proving who is "right."
12. **When you reach a resolution, let it be resolved.** Once a problem is resolved, commit to leaving it in the past. Holding onto resentment or bringing up old issues during future disagreements undermines trust and prevents progress. Practice forgiveness by letting go of grudges and choosing to move forward positively with your partner. Celebrate the resolution as a step toward growth and deeper connection.
13. **Don't retreat into your shell.** Avoid shutting down or withdrawing when an issue bothers you, as this can lead to unresolved resentment and unaddressed needs. While retreating into your shell might feel like a way to keep the peace, it often does more harm than good. Suppressing your feelings can create emotional distance, intensify negative emotions over time, and make it harder for your partner to understand your needs. Healthy relationships rely on open communication, even when it's uncomfortable, to create trust, connection, and mutual growth. It's okay to take time to think about how you want to approach the situation, but make sure to follow through and address it once you feel ready.