

FAIR FIGHTING AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR COUPLES

A. Fight Training Rules (many from George Bach: The Intimate Enemy)

1. Choose time and place by mutual consent
2. Focus on current issues - not past
3. Focus on specific issue - don't gunnysack (save things up, then dump)
4. Know what you're fighting about
5. Level candidly
6. Don't try to win - ever (Team approach instead)
7. Listen for understanding, not for rebuttal
8. No mind-reading, imputing motives, digressing
9. The cycle of anger: accuse, defend, withdraw
10. Say what you see (hear, etc.), say how it makes you feel. say what you prefer, but don't criticize
11. Clarify communications - "What I'm hearing you say is..."
12. Complete communications with acknowledgements
13. Avoid "kitchen sink" arguments (where you throw in everything but)
14. No hitting below the belt
15. No name calling
16. No contaminating the sheets (fighting in bed)
17. If you're not willing to agree to a direct request, suggest an alternative
18. Take agreed upon breaks from fighting
19. Be willing to apologize.....and don't rub it in
20. Don't give orders - you don't own your partner
21. Express appreciations and give compliments sincerely and regularly
22. Treat your partner as having needs, feelings, and behavior that are "understandable, well-intentioned, and normal" as opposed to "stupid, malicious, and crazy"

B. Positive and Specific vs. Negative and General Communication

1. Rules for vocabulary change to enhance communication

- a. "You" statement (accusative) should be turned into "I" statement (feeling)
- b. "Always/never" statements (which imply past and future) should be turned into present (in context) statements
- c. General statements (which allow for misinterpretation and confusion should be turned into specific statements which allow for behavior change)
- d. Negatives (which make someone feel defensive) should be turned into positives (which suggest preferences and/or alternative ways of responding)

2. Common examples of poor communication: Try your hand at turning each statement into positive and specific messages using the rules stated above.

- a. You're a nag!
- b. You don't seem to care anymore.
- c. You never appreciate me.
- d. Our relationship isn't what it used to be.
- e. You care more about your job (school work) than you do about me.
- f. Why are you always horny at the wrong time?
- g. You never consider my feelings when you make decisions.
- h. You're always thinking of yourself.
- i. You never pick up your things.
- j. You're too perfectionistic.