Fair fighting is negotiating with your spouse or partner for change in order to get what you want that will (hopefully) make your relationship more peaceful.

**Unfair fighting includes: yelling, screaming, shaming, "mind reading" (projection of one's inner life on to another), threatening, using any physical aggression, “taking the other's inventory, " bringing up old or off-topic complaints or parts of your "anger museum, "dominating the conversation or using the "silent treatment").**

Fair fighting uses a series of steps of mutual sharing that when followed will facilitate an improved relationship.

These rules and guidelines include:

1) One request or complaint at a time.

2) No unfair tactics allowed. NO passive aggressive behaviors, threats of leaving, discussions of divorce, not hitting below the belt. **See above for reminders**

3) Starting with the request, each partner takes three minutes to say their request or response, while the listener remains silent. This time has to be kept mutual so that each gets the same three minutes or up to a maximum of five minutes if both agree.

4) Each exchange starts with the speaker saying what they just heard from the other, to which the prior speaker affirms or not and says "Thank you."

5) Each alternately speaks until both are complete about their expressions.

6) The invited spouse may accept the invitation, decline, or postpone it.

7) Each uses "I messages" and speaks from and as their real self. When appropriate they can use such wording as: "When you say/do \_\_\_\_\_\_, I feel \_\_\_\_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_\_\_."

Here are the eight core concepts of Bowenian family systems therapy:

Triangles: A triangle is formed when a relationship between two people (such as spouses) involves a third member to function (such as a child).4 These relationships are often very rigid.

Differentiation of self: This concept involves balancing one’s ability to make important life choices while remaining emotionally connected to their family.3 When unbalanced, it can create a lot of issues. Each individual within the family will have a unique differentiation of self, with some being more healthy and some less.

Nuclear family emotional system: This concept states that four basic relationship patterns impact the healthiness of a family unit: marital conflict, dysfunction in one spouse, impairment of one or more children, and emotional distance.3

Family projection process: This is when parents project their struggles onto their child. Instead of working through their issues, they blame their child for the issue. This often results in the child developing the problems that were projected onto them.

Multigenerational transmission process: Bowen believed that the emotional patterns in families are transmitted through many generations.3 When individuals do not work through their inherited trauma, they will likely pass it on to their children.

Emotional cutoff: This is when an individual cuts off all contact with their family unit without working through the present issues.3 This is unhealthy for the individual and all the other individuals within the family unit.

Sibling positions: This is the tendency for specific roles to be assigned to children based on the order in which they were born. These roles likely continue into that child’s future spousal and parenting relationship.3

Societal emotional process: Bowen believed that societal incidents impact a family unit and can exacerbate issues within the family.6

