



Fights Say about Your Relationship



By Brenda Stokes

In this article:

- **What's Your Fighting Style?**
- **Putting an End to Bad Habits**
- **How to Ease Arguing Style?**

Fighting in any relationship is inevitable, and you and your partner will have disagreements. Find out what these arguments mean, what they say about your marriage, and how best to solve them.

Couples fight. No matter how in love you are or how committed, you will bicker, argue, hold grudges, and say nothing's wrong even when you're really mad. Fights can be good. They can allow couples to resolve issues and problems; however, letting what irritates you simmer until it boils over in a big argument is never healthy. Likewise, the particulars of what couples fight about are seldom important; rather, *how* they fight can really put a relationship into perspective.

What's Your Fighting Style?

The key to determining how your fights reflect on you and your relationship lies in your fighting style.

According to Sheryl P. Kurland, author of *Everlasting Matrimony: Pearls of Wisdom from Couples Married 50 Years or More*, there are two kinds of arguers: those who externalize and those who internalize.

"Individuals who externalize lash out and are very verbal, whereas individuals who internalize withdraw into silent furor," says Kurland. So essentially, arguments ensue when these fighting types are pitted against one another.

Debbie Mandel, author of *Turn On Your Inner Light* further breaks down these types of fighting into four categories. See if you can find yourself in one of them:

- **The Boxer:** If you are a boxer, you'll take a tit-for-tat approach. Rather than calmly explaining why being called stupid upsets you, you'll fire back with an equal or worse insult.
- **The Smiler:** Mandel describes this fighting style as a person who smiles yet "holds a dagger behind the back." Essentially, the smiler will pretend that everything is OK, yet hold a grudge for a very long time.

- **The Stone Waller:** This is the passive-aggressive stance many people take during a fight. It's the "Nothing's wrong, I'm fine!" said even when there is clearly something wrong. After all, you didn't used to give short answers to your partner's questions or purse your lips all the time, did you?

- **The Diplomat:** This fighter should definitely run for office. She is a regular politician and knows how to smooth over anything, and I do mean anything. Before a diplomat tells you that your latest cooking efforts are better left in the trashcan, he or she will preface the soon-to-be huge disagreement with, "You're looking lovely today" or, "Have you been working out?"

Once you figure out your fighting style, you can start to change it. For example, if you fall under "The Boxer" category, you may be "insecure about your own power and self-worth and therefore must always respond with 'teaching that lesson,'" suggests Mandel. Rather than reacting immediately in a situation, knowing your fighting style can help you understand why you respond in the manner that you do so that you can break the pattern of behavior, Mandel says.

Most disagreements erupt when a strength is paired with a weakness, according to Kurland. "One partner is more experienced, more skilled, more knowledgeable, or more informed than the other on the subject matter in conflict," says Kurland. The result ends up being a fight.

What really matters, says Kurland, is how the fight is resolved. If it is finished, and both parties are satisfied, the fight can actually strengthen the relationship. If a fight is allowed to simmer for days without resolution, it can be damaging.

Finally, how you fight can say a lot about you as an individual. Kurland says that "conflicts can be interpreted as a longing for attention, a sign of selfishness, an outlet for releasing what's been festering underneath one's skin for some time," and more. It can even just be a sign that you're irritable, tired, or stressed.

Putting an End to Bad Habits

Now that you recognize the fighting styles, you can learn how to banish those bad habits and take on a healthier method of coping with disagreements.

"Never return fire," says Joel Epstein, author of *The Little Book on Big Ego*. Even if your partner says something offensive to you, "be nice in the face of nastiness." This allows you to get to the end of the disagreement faster and to come to some sort of compromise.

Another great way to resolve conflict is to follow the 85/15 rule, says Kurland. If your partner is really passionate or has more conviction about an issue, he should be allowed 85 percent of the desired outcome to go in his favor, while you receive 15 percent in yours. As time goes on, the acquisition of a desired outcome will go back and forth, allowing for a balanced, healthy playing field, says Kurland. Essentially, the compromise will be in his majority sometimes and in yours other times. The natural progression of your relationship will balance it out.

Most of the time, couples' fights concern silly, trivial things. Rather than getting all bent out of shape, laugh! "A hearty laugh is a far better choice than endless arguing and blaming," Kurland says.

Keeping in line with the trivial, if your husband leaves his dirty underwear all over the bedroom floor, you no doubt do something that he finds equally irritating, like keeping your manicure stuff out on the coffee table. In this case, you have a choice—you can either fight about it or just accept that you each have annoying habits. Kurland refers to this as a "you have your department, I have my department" sort of thing. Hubby leaves his underwear out, you like your nail polish out. It's no big deal. Recognizing the offending habits and opting to deal with them rather than fight eliminates the problem altogether.

How to Ease Arguing

Changing your fighting style comes down to the little things. And what better way to change your style than in the moment of the argument? Here are a few tips to make conflicts a smoother affair:

- **Be precise and concise:** "Men have a hard time reading women," says Mandel, so it is important to get your message across in under two minutes so that he stays in the moment with you. Anything longer than that and he's too occupied with trying to figure out what you mean rather than listening. Be sure to be specific. He can't read your mind.
- **Be understanding:** "Timing is everything" says Mandel. If either one of you are stressed, the argument will turn into a monster. Postpone your discussion until both of you are calmer.
- **Don't think of winning versus losing:** Winning should not even be a word you think of when arguing with your significant other. "A fight should never be an all-or-nothing competition," says Kurland. Compromise is the key.
- **Think before you react:** Rather than letting whatever hurtful thing comes to your head spew out of your mouth during an argument, take a moment to think about what you're about to say. Both parties need to have their "Information Traffic Cop" on duty, according to Epstein. This "Information Traffic Cop" is the little person in your ear who decides whether what you hear is going to go to your brain for a logical reaction or your ego for an emotional reaction," says Epstein.
- **Take the time to listen:** It is so easy to fly off the handle when you hear something you disagree with. But before you start a shouting match, take a moment to summarize your partner's position in your head, Mandel says. What are they really saying? Can you see the matter from their perspective? Taking the time to do this can help stop a fight before it starts.

Hopefully, some of these tips will help you and your partner find common ground when the road gets rocky.