

Fighting Fair

Invest in lasting relationships with tools for navigating conflict.

Relationships can bring us tremendous joy, companionship, and support. They can also bring strife. Because no two people want exactly the same thing or always feel or think the same way, conflict in a relationship is inevitable. However, very few of us have learned how to successfully navigate conflict. Too often, our conversations about disagreements end in intense silence, disconnection, or a shouting match. Fortunately, we can turn to tried and tested methods for tackling relationship conflict.

Rules of thumb

- 1 Strong, sometimes painful, emotions in a relationship are OK and important.**

Emotions aren't good or bad. Consider emotions as messengers that tell us what's going on. We can learn to care for one another better by accepting and understanding the negative emotions that show up in our relationships.

- 2 No one is "right."**

Each of us has subjective realities. When we cling tightly to the perspective that someone must be "right," we miss the opportunity to truly understand each other and resolve our differences.

- 2 For successful relationships, acceptance and admiration come first.**

Conflict feels so painful because we care about the person. Resolving it is hard when we don't show care or respect. That's why it's important to express acceptance and admiration, even during disagreements.

Steps for tackling conflict

1 Start gently

Criticism and contempt breed defensiveness. Defensiveness shuts down a willingness to hear what's being said and inevitably prevents resolution. So, it's helpful to begin conflict discussions gently, not harshly.

- ✓ Acknowledge your part in the conflict.
- ✓ Focus on a specific situation.
- ✓ Communicate how you feel.
- ✓ Say what you need.

Harsh start example: "You never do anything around the house. How do you think you get clean clothes on your back? Must be nice!"

Gentle start example: "I know I don't ask for help with chores, but I'm annoyed that I came home to a sink of dirty dishes. Can you please load the dishwasher?"

2 Make and receive "peace offerings"

A peace offering is a way of putting on the brakes when criticism and contempt sneak into an argument. These gestures can help keep our arguments under control. There are countless ways to make peace offerings, and they work best when they match our personalities and relationship styles. To get started, practice some of the following examples:

"I'm feeling defensive.
Can you say that
differently?"

"Please be
more gentle."

"Can we start
over?"

"That's a
good point."

"My feelings
are hurt."

"I'm sorry
about that."

"Let's find a
compromise."

"I think we're on the
same page about..."

3 Keep your cool

It's important that we keep our anger in check while expressing negative emotions during conflict discussions. If our bodies become too activated by unchecked anger, the part of our brain that understands others' perspectives and seeks resolution shuts down. Instead, we may have thoughts like, "I shouldn't have to deal with this!" or "No one understands me!" This makes it difficult to find resolution.

If you notice the telltale signs of rising anger and too much activation (e.g., thumping heart, feeling very hot, holding your breath, feeling overwhelmed, clouded thinking), it's time to take a break and calm down. You can take a break through these steps:

Tell the person you need some time to calm down, and take at least 20 minutes. Agree on a time when you'll return to the discussion.

When you take a break, soothe yourself with 10 or more deep breaths.

When you find yourself thinking about the argument, direct your attention back to your breath.

You could also calm down by distracting yourself with another activity (e.g., watch a funny video, play a game, etc.).

4 Compromise

Conflict often means that we want something different than what the other person wants. To resolve conflict, we have to negotiate so we each get some of what we want. Compromising requires being open-minded to the other person's perspective. For help with compromising, try the following:

- ✓ Ask questions to better understand the other person's perspective.
- ✓ Look for any part of the other person's perspective that a neutral party would find reasonable.
- ✓ Be clear and generous about what you're willing to give. Often, the more we give, the more we get.



Get expert guidance

Navigating conflicts in relationships can be challenging. You don't have to do it alone. Lyra's mental health experts offer personalized support to equip you with strategies that fit your unique situation.

Book a Lyra session today at care.lyrahealth.com to get more help with improving your communication skills and relationships.