

# FAIR FIGHTING GUIDELINES/RULES

**1) Set a Time:** Both need to agree to a time to discuss the issue but it should be done in a reasonable amount of time from when the issue came up. Also set an amount of time to talk about the issue. Example: 20 minutes or 30 minutes. If the issue is not resolved by then come back to it an agreed upon time.

**2) State the Problem:** Describe the facts of the behaviour or situation. Stick to the observable facts and the impact on you.

**3) Stick to one Issue:** Try not to bring in many issues or dredge up the past. Focus on the single issue.

**4) Express the Full Range of Feelings:** Use "I" messages and try to describe the full range of feelings rather than just anger. Example "I felt frustrated when I got interrupted and I was hurt by the accusation that I don't care enough."

**5) Propose Change:** Be clear, specific about what you want to see change. State it in behavioural terms. Example "I would like us to spend time together without other couples one evening every two weeks."

**6) Describe Consequences:** Give both the benefits and consequences to the change – people usually respond more readily to the positives. Do not use empty threats or dire consequences out of proportion to the problem.

**7) Prevent Escalation:** Watch non-verbal behaviour; breathe deeply to slow down the pace of your exchange; take a time out. Time outs have specific rules:

Agree in advance of the signal;

No last words;

Leave immediately for a set amount of time;

Always return;

Don't use drugs or alcohol during a time out;

Don't rehearse what happened - focus on how you can return to the discussion more positively;

Check in when you return.

**8) End in Agreement, Counter Proposal, or Postponement:** Find a common ground that you can both agree to which could be any one of the three options. If you postpone, agree to a time to come back to the issue. As much as is possible, do not let issues worsen.