

FIGHTING FAIR

by Dr. Valerie Correa

CONSIDER THIS SCENARIO:

Grab two people who have intense feelings toward one another. Give them an impending deadline. Tell them that this will be one of the most important events in their lives and their dearest family and friends will witness the end result. Then expect them to achieve this task feeling blissful and romantic about each other. No, this is not a new reality show; it is the age-old tradition of planning a wedding.

Wedding planning is often a crash course in problem solving.

It is a time to get rid of your old notion that conflict is bad. Conflict is only bad if you make poor choices during conflict. Based on these negative notions, we often begin the process of a fight with anxiety, defensiveness, and fear. We approach fighting with the desire to win the argument rather than to work towards a compromise. Instead, look at conflict as an opportunity for positive change, and see disagreement as a way to enhance your relationship rather than tearing it down. If you did not learn to fight fair during your courtship, you may want to review these pointers for problem solving; they can insulate your marriage.

CREATE A *CLIMATE* FOR PROBLEM SOLVING

COMMITMENT Your commitment provides a safety net for you during fighting. Therefore, do not threaten to leave, divorce or ask your partner to get out during a fight as that is undermining your commitment to one another. Take time to cool down and then re-convene. Often, resolving conflict is a way for couples to re-commit to one another; they commit to a better relationship and to improving their daily life with one another.

LANGUAGE Words are powerful and the manner in which we communicate them gives them meaning. Calling your partner names, cursing, or making demeaning comments only aggravates the stress that naturally is created while problem solving. Be aware of your tone of voice, gestures, looks, and see if they are moving toward connection or rejection.

INTENT Question your reasons for initiating a fight. Is your intention to seek revenge, incite passion, gain attention, inform your partner, or problem solve? Make sure you understand your motives before beginning.

MAKE YOUR POINT If you want to solve a problem, you should stick to the problem at hand. If you bring up past issues, or numerous topics, your focus gets blurred and your partner will not understand the true issue that is concerning you. Stay on track, be clear, concise, and direct.

ACCEPTANCE A key part of solving conflict is accepting another's point of view. To understand that point of view, you must take the time to listen, ask questions, and respect your partner's uniqueness. It is difficult to be upset with someone when you understand how they feel and think.

TIMING There is a time and place for discussing problems with your mate. For example, it is not effective to problem solve when you have company, your partner just walked in from work, or your partner is falling asleep. You can usually pick a time that is optimal for both parties to resolve conflict.

EMOTIONS Pick a time to problem solve when you are more rational than irrational. You will have difficulty negotiating, compromising, and/or resolving issues if you have a hot head. Give yourself time to cool down so you can communicate your feelings effectively and respectfully.

Enjoy your preparation for marriage and celebrate the magic that has drawn you two together. Meet your partner half way before your eyes meet down the aisle. Create a positive *CLIMATE* for your marriage and let the sparks fly.

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