Rules to Fighting Fair for Families

All families engage in conflict, but the key is resolving conflict without being destructive. Here are some Do’s and Don’ts to Fighting Fair to remind you of how to fight Fair!

**DO:**
1. **Deal with the Here and Now.** What is the specific problem right now? Anything older than 24 hours is garbage, so no garbage dumping!
2. **Take responsibility.** Use “I” statements as a way to show you are taking responsibility for your own feelings and actions. Try using the 4-Step process from the Non-Violent Communication technique by Marshall Rosenberg:
   - **State the observation.** “I noticed that….”
   - **State the feeling** connected to the observation. “I feel happy, sad, mad, embarrassed, etc. (Use a FEELING, NOT a THOUGHT or OPINION).
   - **State the need** connected to the feeling. “I need peace, safety, clarity, security, respect, orderliness, etc.
   - **State your request in the form of a question.** No one wants to be told what to do, so PLEASE be sure to ask, not demand. “Would you be willing to….. or Would you consider…..” etc.
3. **Be direct and honest** about your feelings and what you want.
4. **Listen and hear!** Try to understand the other person’s perceptions of the situation as well as your own. Be aware of his/her feelings as well as your own. Check to see whether what you heard is really what the other person is trying to express, and ask them to let you know what they hear you saying.
5. **Give the other person equal time.** Both people need to express their feelings and points of view to create a full mutual understanding. If one person tends to dominate conversations, set a timer to ensure equal time.
6. **Attack the issue, not the person.** Name-calling puts people in a position to respond angrily and defensively. This is usually used when a person feels he is losing. Name-calling breaks down communication and destroys trust in the relationship.
7. **Take a breather by paraphrasing what you think you heard them saying.** “What I heard you say is…..” Try to use their exact words and state what they said as non-judgmentally as possible. Stating what you heard them say does not mean you are agreeing with what they said. It is allowing them to have the experience of being understood, which is the first step to deepening connection.
8. **Focus on solving a problem/reaching a solution rather than venting your anger or winning a victory.** Think win-win.
9. **Deal with one issue at a time.** No fair piling several complaints into one session. Some people call this “kitchen-sinking” – talking about everything including the kitchen sink!
10. **Limit your discussion/fight to no more than 30 minutes.** Adults have relatively short attention spans & kids are even shorter – just look at television
programming to confirm this. Long drawn out discussions/fights rarely reach resolution. Instead they just wear the participants out. And when you are worn out, the potential of saying or doing something you’ll regret is much greater. If you are unable to solve your problem in the 30 minutes that you’ve allotted, schedule another time to continue.

11. **Brainstorm solutions.** Be willing to compromise. Give a little to get a little.

12. **Go forth as equals.** Don’t use power plays. Gauge the intensity of your anger to the ego strength of the other person and be responsible with the things your family member has entrusted to you in your relationship. Remember that you are on the same team.

13. **When necessary, take a time-out.** A time-out is a short break to cool off, calm down and get perspective. Think of it like pushing the pause button on a video. It’s an opportunity to restore calm and be more reflective instead of reactive. Use the time-out to reflect on why you feel the way you do and how to express yourself in a positive way. Try to think about the other person’s feelings and point of view. Think things through before you speak. Then “push play” again and return to each other to resolve the issues calmly. A time-out should be at least a half-hour long (but no longer than twenty-four hours). It takes at least a half-hour for your body’s physiology to return to a normal resting state and for your thoughts to become less hostile or defensive. It’s surprising how different a person’s outlook can be after they’ve had a chance to calm down.

14. **Give each other the ability to withdraw or change their mind.**

15. **Speak softly.** If you have a natural tendency to raise your voice, try whispering.

16. **Identify and define your issue or topic, and stick to it!** Don’t change the subject or bring in unrelated items. If you have a different item you’d like to discuss, save it for the next discussion.

17. **Hold hands.** It is a good physical demonstration and reminder that you are on the same team. You are not fighting each other, but talking over a problem you are mutually trying to resolve For Teenagers holding hands could be awkward, so making good eye contact could replace holding hands.

18. **Ask questions that will clarify, not judge.** A question should never begin with the word “why.” That puts people on the defensive — and we know that defensiveness stops conversation rather than continues it. Try using phrases like, “Help me understand…”, or “How did you come to that conclusion?” or “What gave you that impression/idea?

**DON’T:**

1. **Don’t Refer to past mistakes and incidences.** No garbage dumping! 😞

2. **Don’t Blame.** Use “I” statements rather than “you” statements that automatically blame, making the other person defensive.

3. **Don’t make comparisons** to other people, stereotypes, or situations.

4. **Don’t play games.** A game is being played when you are not being straight about your feelings, and when you are not being direct and honest about what you want or need in a situation. Examples of games are; poor me; silent
treatment; martyr; don’t touch me; uproar; kick me; if it weren’t for you… yes, but… see what you made me do; and if you loved me…
5. Don’t involve other people’s opinions of the situation (e.g.: “John’s mother agrees with me.” Or “But, Jennifer’s mom lets her go out past midnight.”) The only opinions, which are relevant, are those of the two attempting to communicate at the time.
6. Don’t make threats (e.g., “Do this or else!”). Threats back people into a corner and they may choose the ultimatum in order to save face. You may find later you really do not want to carry out your threat.
7. Don’t demand to win. If you do, your discussion will surely become an argument.
8. Don’t say “always” and “never”. (“You always…” “You never…””) these are usually exaggerations and will put the other person on the defensive.
9. Don’t interrupt, talk over or make comments while the other person is speaking. Watch your non-verbal expressions too. Rolling eyes, smirking, yawning etc. all work against fair fighting.
10. Don’t walk away or leave the house without saying a promise to return. “I’m feeling flooded right now and don’t want to say something I don’t mean, so I am going to take a walk to cool off and I will be back in 20 minutes”.
11. No finger pointing.
12. Don’t save up feelings and dump them all at once, try to air feelings often.
13. No yelling.
14. No talk of Running Away. In the heat of an argument, threatening to leave is manipulative and hurtful. Threatening to leave is manipulative and hurtful.
15. Don’t read your parent’s/child/sibling/family member’s mind.
14. Don’t expect your parent/child to read your mind.
15. Don’t use the following: swearing, denunciation, obscenities, character assassination, contempt, sarcasm, or taunting.
16. Do not assume, guess, imagine, take for granted, theorize, surmise, speculate, make gestures, judgments, funny glances or faces about what your mom/dad/sibling/family member means. Find out!
17. No belittling each other’s accomplishments. No matter how small or odd they may be.
18. Don’t be afraid to apologize when you are wrong. It shows you are trying.
19. Don’t argue about details, which is an easy way to distract from the problem. Avoid exchanges like, “You were 20 minutes late,” “No, I was only 13 minutes late.” (In this example the problem might be chronic tardiness.)

Whenever possible close with a family hug!