

Fighting Fair

By Susan Vogt



Remember those long and intimate conversations in the springtime of your marriage, perhaps when you were just discovering your love for each other or during your engagement. Well, any intense, intimate relationship hits times of disagreement and conflict. If couples always agree on everything it often means one partner is overly dominant or the other overly passive. Christ continues to tell us to love one another – even when we fall into bickering or disillusionment. Fighting Fair gives us some tools to make those disagreements productive and eventually lead to deeper love.

For

Adult / Couple

Season

Spring

Needed

Recent or recurring argument (You do have at least a teeny-tiny one to practice with, don't you? ☺)

Prepare in advance:

- Agree on a time and a quiet spot that you and your spouse can talk for at least 15 minutes without interruption.
- Start to think of unresolved arguments you've had that you might want to address.
- Read over the article "25 Ways to Fight Fair" <http://foryourmarriage.org/25-ways-to-fight-fair/>
- (If you are not married, see variation below.)

Activity Plan:

1. Pray: Hold hands and sit quietly in each other's presence for about one minute. Pray something like the following:

Loving God, you know we love each other even though we sometimes hurt each other. You came into a world that had (and still has) many problems, wars, and selfishness. You told us to love our neighbor as ourselves. My beloved next to me is my nearest neighbor. Help us to love each other better.

2. Decide what issue you want to try to resolve with your spouse. It could be a recurring disagreement about division of chores or a recent tiff like an insult or something one of you forgot to do. Although it can be a big or small issue, it might be best to start with a relatively small one for practice.
3. One spouse states the problem as clearly as possible and then the other repeats it in their own words. (You might be familiar with this tool called "Active Listening" or "Shared Meaning.") Spouse #1 then confirms or clarifies the problem.
4. Spouse #2 gets to explain his/her different position. Repeat the Active Listening process.

5. Rate the strength of your feeling. Each spouse decides how strongly you feel about the issue on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being, "I don't care that much" to 10 being, "I feel very strongly about getting my way on this." Based on this ranking, discuss options and whether one should give in, both compromise somewhere in the middle, agree to disagree, or whether you have to create a totally new solution. See the article "When We Disagree" <http://www.susanvogt.net/EnrichmentEx.htm#whenwedisagree> for more background.
6. Don't let the discussion go too long. You may just be able to take a small step toward resolution during this sitting. Be grateful that your commitment to each other is stronger than your disagreement.
 - Apologize if appropriate.
 - Think of one thing each of you can do to prevent the problem in the future.
 - Hug (or whatever) and have a favorite treat.

Variation (by yourself)

If you are not married or it's not possible to do this with your spouse, you might decide that there is an unresolved problem with one of your children or another family member that you would like to put to rest. Propose the same general steps to this other person.

