

Marriage & Family

Rules of Conflict

1. Describe your feelings, using “I” instead of starting with “you”
2. Focus on the specific and current behavior, and don’t label the other person in a bad way. Examples: “You’re such a slob” versus “I’d like it if you’d remember to put the wet towels in the hamper”; “You’re thoughtless,” versus “I feel really sad that you forgot our anniversary”; “You never help with the children,” versus “I’d feel much less stressed if you helped with the children’s bedtime routine.”
3. Don’t be so focused on winning. Be able to apologize.
4. Use kind words and a kind tone of voice. Consciously work on adding polite, genuinely kind words and phrases to your dialogue with your spouse, such as “please,” “thank you,” and “I so appreciate when you”
5. Express some kind of appreciation before offering a complaint.
6. Don’t keep things inside until you feel filled up and then dump everything out at once. If you carry around your complaints and hard feelings and then dump them all at once on your spouse, it’s more likely that it will be too much for him/her to handle and he/she will be automatically defensive and not hear what you have to say.
7. Avoid ultimatums.
8. Listen to what the other person has to say.
9. Always check your perceptions.
10. State wishes and wants clearly and directly. A technique that can work is W-I-N: **W**hen you . . . **I** feel . . . **I** Need . . .
11. Don’t use sex to smooth over an argument.
12. Don’t fight dirty.
13. Don’t give the silent treatment. The silent treatment is a form of quiet aggression.
14. Call time-outs and fouls.

15. Don't take it out on your spouse.
16. Use humor.
17. When the fight is over, drop it.
18. Write down your feelings.
19. Use these important phrases: "Now I understand," "Maybe you're right," and "I'm sorry."

This material comes from *Alabama Marriage Handbook*, 15-16.

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