

## Fighting Fair

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 1 Cor. 13:4-7*

Does it seem a bit strange to begin talking about fighting with a quote on love? I Corinthians 13 is often read at weddings where it summons rosy pictures of everlasting marital bliss. However, if you've ever had a relationship with *anyone* (parent, sibling, friend, co-worker, etc.), then you know that relationships involve conflict, compromise and effort. That's really what I Corinthians 13 is about – doing the work of relationship, which is difficult, extended, personally transforming work, that must be done with love. So go back and read that quote again, specifically with fighting in mind.

Now you are ready for some fair-fighting strategies. As you read them, put a check mark in the box next to those ideas which you especially need to work on.

- Protect your privacy.** Love always protects. No fair fighting in public. Someone is going to be embarrassed – probably everyone will be. It's a sacrifice to put off immediate emotional satisfaction, but it's vital to your relationship. Ask the other person to continue your discussion in private. Set a later time and place, if necessary. In addition, protect your children, if you have any. Please don't fight in front of them, but if you do, make sure you reconcile in front of them, too.
- Be patient.** Love is. Some people need a little time to calm down and collect their thoughts. Consider whether it would be best to delay the conversation. Don't insist on a discussion on *your* timetable. Ask your partner if this is a good time to talk; if it isn't, ask them when they might be ready. Try to bend toward them and negotiate a time that would work for both of you.
- Don't be rude.** Love is kind; it is not rude. That means no name calling, no buzz words, no irrelevant accusations. Don't use absolutes like "never" and "always." Talk about your own feelings rather than the other person's actions. For example, "When you didn't introduce me I felt left out" is much better than, "You always act like I'm not even there." One is an invitation; the other is an attack.

- Don't bring up the past.** Love keeps no record of wrongs. Past problems must be put through an ongoing process of forgiveness until they don't reappear in your conversations. If they do keep coming up, you have NOT completely forgiven them. The thing you are fighting about now is a new offense. If you have noted a pattern you want to talk about, be upfront about that – don't sneak it in as extra ammunition.
- Deal with your own anger.** Love is not easily angered. This means that you give your partner the benefit of the doubt. Do not treat them like a person who would deliberately wound you. Treat them like a well-meaning person with a misunderstanding. Anger is a strong emotion that is often used to cover up more sensitive ones like fear, loneliness or hurt feelings. Love always trusts, so trust your partner to handle your deeper pain, and spare them your weapons of anger.
- Find common goals.** Think teamwork, not competition. Love is not self-seeking, and it always hopes for good things. Begin your discussion by stating some positive goals you'd like to work toward. For example, "I'd like to talk about Jimmy's birthday party again so we can explore more economical ways of giving him a special day." If you need to stop in the middle to clarify your goals, please do. For example, "I don't want us to end up mad at each other. I just want to discuss some better ways of handling our office friendships."
- Tell the truth.** Love rejoices with the truth. It's tempting to exaggerate, assume, manipulate and downright lie when you are in the middle of an argument. If you are not sure about something, say so. You are not responsible for how the other person sees or describes a situation, but you *are* responsible for your own words. If you find later that you got carried away and misrepresented something, go back and apologize. It's only fair.
- Be humble.** It is very easy to believe that your perspective is the only valid one, but our biases and perceptions color everything. Love does not boast or insist on its own way. Love acknowledges that someone else could legitimately see the issue differently. If you are working on staying in relationship, then you are working toward a compromise. There are more important things than being right.
- Reiterate commitment.** Try not to leave an argument without restating your love for and commitment to your partner. You can do this even if you haven't resolved the issue. Long-term relationships don't last because there are no arguments; they last because people fight fair and stay connected. Arguments come and go, but love always perseveres.