

Ten Dirty Fight Tactics to Avoid

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

One of the most important things necessary to improve your communication and problem solving abilities is development of the ability to interrupt old patterns of dysfunctional, ineffective, and destructive patterns. You cannot communicate and problem solve effectively by "fighting dirty". It can take awhile before you completely eliminate old habits and replace them with effective, new, relationship-enhancing abilities.

In order to change a behavior or to be able to solve a problem, you must first identify the problem. The list below will help you to identify your problematic communication behaviors. These roadblocks virtually guarantee that your intended messages will not be received and that you will not accomplish the communication goals that you have in mind. Although it is tempting to identify the dirty fight tactics that your spouse, (or significant other) uses, focus on your communication errors.

1. Naming calling, character assassination
2. Ridiculing or shaming
3. Laundry list
4. Ignoring, refusing to engage in the discussion
5. Diversionary tactics such as turning the tables or changing the subject, intellectualizing
6. Intimidating with non-verbal communication like eye-rolling, "the look", a closed stance
7. Intimidating with verbal characteristics like sarcastic tone, aggressive tone, inappropriate volume
8. Timing, (e.g., waiting until they are walking out the door to go to work to bring up a subject), or making sure that there is only enough time to say what you want to say and not enough for the other person to respond
9. Placating or pretending to agree

10. Hitting below the belt; bringing up things that you know will hurt them

These are but a few of the dirty fight tactics that couples use everyday. These communication behaviors bring up immediate defenses and often start arguments about the dirty fight tactic itself. These communication behaviors get in the way of a couple's ability to say what they mean to say, to be heard, and to be able to move to the next level of appropriate problem solving. There are a number of communication activities and worksheets available on this site for couples to develop listening skills, fair fight tactics, and life skills important for improvement in couple communication and problem solving.

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Rates & Insurance
Ask Peggy
Marriage Article
Sex Addiction Articles
Skill Building Articles
Family Dynamics of
Addiction & Recovery
Addiction Articles
Recovery Solutions for
Families with Addiction
Articles
Addiction Recovery
Worksheets
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