

RELATIONSHIP SURVIVAL RULES

By W. Terrence Mooney, PhD

- Don't give up socializing just because you've had kids. Children are wonderful and add immense joy to our lives, but you started as a couple so continue your socializing with dinner parties, with other couples, with other families. Healthy couples know how to have fun, not only with their children, but also with their friends.
- Remember to plan respite for each other; have 'couple time,' just for yourselves to get away. Get a reliable baby sitter and create a regular date night once a week.
- Work out a schedule each week. On Sunday night pull out the week's schedule and take a look at what's going on for each child, what's going on with each other; who's out of town, who's in town; when is soccer, when is violin, and put it on the refrigerator.
- Set a time once per week, once per month – whatever makes sense for your schedule- for what I call 'couch' sessions. Sit down, listen and develop an empathic understanding of your partner's concerns and feelings.
- Remember, don't sweat the small things, most things you are going to argue about are small things.
- Learn to "fight fair." Take it behind the woodshed if you are going to argue. The kids don't need to hear your negative, sometimes abusive or hostile language towards each other. It is important to seek to understand, not just to defend. Try to understand your partner's point of view.

Rules for fighting fairly:

- No abusive language or behavior
- No name calling
- No blame
- No sarcasm
- Use "I feel" statements
- Be specific about the behavior that is annoying to you and be specific about the behavior change you are requesting of your partner.
- Don't drift off the beam. Keep coming back to whatever your matter of concern is or the feeling that you have. Stay focused on the matter that you are discussing.
- Keep your voice neutral; *No* raising your voice.
- If your partner is not able to discuss the matter you want to discuss at the time of your choosing, then select a time that is mutually convenient within 24 to 48 hours. Remember, either person in the relationship could call a 'time-out' instead of escalating to the point where it's moving quickly out of control. It is permissible to be the participant to raise the 'time-out' flag and to suspend your discussion. Each party must respect the rule for time out, so each of you knows there is an escape valve if things begin to escalate.

Keep these rules for relationship survival and fighting fairly, and your relationship will be enhanced.