

Rules of Engagement for the Healthy Couple or How To Fight in A Healthy Relationship

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1. Remember to take it behind the woodshed. Your kids are listening and likely will hear all the horrific things that should not be said.
2. No abusive language or behavior should be part of any healthy relationship. The foundation of good communication is **respect** and **listening**.
3. Remember to use the “I” statements. Say, “I am feeling...” about whatever behavior you are talking about and then always tag it with a request or a need – “My need is...” The ABCs of communicating are: A) The “I” statement, B) about whatever behavior and C) What it is you need.
4. Try not to drift off beam. If you have some feedback for your partner, be specific. They don’t need a litany; they just need a specific complaint and keep it on one issue. Don’t start dragging in the kitchen sink.
5. Both parties should know that if things start to spiral out of control it is okay to declare a time-out and leave it for 24 hours. “Just leave it” is the command I use with Chester when I might want him to drop something and it’s a command you can give each other. Any person can call “time out” and it needs to be respected.
6. No blaming, threatening, or ordering.
7. Remember to build in time for positive things. So build in time for socialization with other couples, build in time for yourself alone with your partner.
8. Respite for each other from the strains of raising children, two careers, paying bills and survival.
9. Seek to understand, not just to defend. It is more important to be happy and understanding than it is to be right.
10. Work out schedules. Try to work out your schedule every week to avoid conflict and misunderstandings. Take a look at the calendar for five minutes, look at the schedule and see who is doing what when, with which kid, for what purpose.
11. As you might imagine couples start counting one another’s infractions. If you are negatively tracking your relationship, it is out of control. Your commitment is to understand, not to document. Try to communicate your needs honestly, respectfully and in a genuine (not abusive) tone.