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## newsletter...

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#### How to Stop Fighting Dirty and Stay in Love

In my Fight-free Families book, I describe 15 good reasons to fight! It's normal for folk to fight – we all have a need to be heard and understood!

Fair-fighting lets you air differences and find compromises that you both can live with, and it helps you stay connected. BUT the danger is in using dirty fighting tricks which will inevitably lead to detachment and divorce.

John Gottman's love lab at the University of Washington has researched how couples fight. After watching the first three minutes of an argument they can predict, with a high level of accuracy which couples will divorce if they don't change their poor fighting style.

**Dirty-Fighting Habit #1: Swallowing your gripes, then dumping them all at once**

#### Clean Fix:

If you or your spouse tends to avoid conflict, schedule a check-in – a regular time every day for you both to bring up whatever's irking you, so you'll feel safe speaking your mind.

During an argument, if either of you starts airing your gripes from the past, agree to take a time-out until you can deal only with the problem at hand.

**Dirty-Fighting Habit #2: Playing prosecutor**

This is the counterpart to habit #1: When one of you avoids conflict, the other may become so frustrated that he or she becomes a relentless interrogator or supernag.

#### Clean Fix:

If you can keep conflict avoidance to a minimum, chances are the interrogator will disappear. In the meantime, work on your approach: Instead of saying, "What is so important on television that you have to turn it on the minute you walk in the door?" try, "It bugs me that you come home and turn on the television without first checking to see if I need help with the kids and dinner."

You know if you are nagging if your partner looks like a "pinned butterfly" – reacts as if there's a pin stuck through his chest, holding him down while he tries to flee.

**Dirty-Fighting Habit #3: Getting too intense**

#### Clean Fix:

Fighting is frightening; if you bring a little good-natured levity into the conversation, you'll remind each other that although your anger feels very real now, it's only temporary. If something strikes you as funny mid-argument (and the joke isn't at your partner's expense), don't hesitate to share it. You-and-me-against-the-world humor in particular can be a big help.

#### Dirty-Fighting Habit #4: Trying to win at all costs

When you focus on winning the argument, you're not putting the relationship first.

##### Clean Fix:

Your goal should be to find a compromise that pleases both of you.

#### Dirty-Fighting Habit #5: Turning off the Love

##### Clean Fix:

Of course it's tough to show love when you're irritated. But doing it reminds you both that your bond is stronger than any disagreement and that you really want to work things out.

Use the L-word and make it clear that even though you're angry with one another right now, you're still in love. Touch can be helpful too, as long as it's delivered at a time when the argument is cooling down.

#### Dirty-Fighting Habit #6: Getting defensive

When one or both of you find yourselves saying, "Yes, but..." it's a sign that you've slammed your minds shut to what the other has just said.

##### Clean Fix:

Acknowledge it aloud when you're feeling defensive or when you spot defensiveness in your spouse. Then step back, give yourself a breather, and try to rephrase your last rebuttal. For instance, instead of saying, "Yes, but..." try, "I'm sorry my saying that made you unhappy; that really wasn't my intention at all."

#### Dirty-Fighting Habit #7: Being nasty and even toxic

Most of us know how lousy it feels to be on the receiving end of a hurtful put-down. Remember that you have a choice every time you say something to each other; you can choose to tear down your relationship with your words, or you can nurture it. Similarly, remember that criticizing something your partner has done (he forgot to do the dishes) is different from telling him he's a lazy slob. The same goes for being sarcastic, mocking, and showing contempt – all are hurtful and permanently damaging to a relationship.

##### Clean Fix:

The next time you're ready to hurl some ugly words at your spouse, ask yourself, "Would I talk to my best friend or my boss the way I am about to speak to my husband?" Then choose your words carefully. Complain about the behaviour but don't attack your partner's personality.