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## FAIR FIGHTING RULES FOR COUPLES

*To insure communication continues in order to resolve conflict. That means being able to express your thoughts, feelings, beliefs and actions. It also means being able to listen to your partner as s/he speaks his/her thoughts, feelings beliefs and actions. The most loving thing you can do is to **listen** to your partner.*

1. **No name-calling.** When your partner calls you a name you focus on that insult and do not hear what else s/he is saying. If you call your partner a name, s/he will be unable to hear what you say.
2. **No tissue damage.** If you and/or your partner are physically violent, this will stop communication.
3. **No fighting in public.** If conflict arises in a public place, such as in a restaurant or in front of friends, one of the partners will stop communicating. (Public does not apply to psychotherapy sessions).
4. **No using your friends or the therapist as a “club”.** “Well, all our friends say you’re.....Or The therapist said you were .....” We will stop listening to whatever else our partner is saying and wonder which of our friends is talking about us.
5. **No Exits Clause.** When a couple learns to start communicating, conflicts will come to the forefront. It is okay to be emotional. It is not okay to say: “Well, if you’re so unhappy with me then why don’t you just leave?” or “If you mention that one more time, I’m going to leave.” Both of these kinds of messages are exiting messages. Telling your partner they are fired or I’m leaving will shut down communication. The goal is to keep communicating so as to resolve conflict.
6. **Time out.** If you feel like you’re going to call your partner a name, or hit a wall or him/her, or fight in public or use your friends/therapist as a club, or make exiting statements, then you are out of control. You need to ask for a time out and spend some time with yourself to see why you are so emotional. It usually is a Family of Origin issue. Then you go back to your partner and explain what you’ve learned about yourself and why you were so emotional. If you can’t come to any insight, than ask that you and your partner bring the issue up at the next couples session.