



# FIGHT RIGHT

## *Make Arguments Work For You*

You may think that couples should get along all the time. But couples who learn how to argue successfully actually have better relationships. Arguments needn't be bitter or aggressive; in fact, the following tips can show you how to "fight right" and strengthen your relationship.

### **The Three Stages Of Successful Arguing**

The happiest couples go through three stages during a disagreement:

First, they say what's bothering them using "I feel..." statements about specific behaviors. Say: "I feel upset when you slam the door;" not "You're so noisy!" Be positive, not negative. Say: "I appreciate it when you call me if you're going to be late;" not "If you don't tell me what time you're coming home, dinner will be burnt!" Each person listens to the other's feelings without commenting, defending, or disagreeing.

Second, the partners discuss the details of their disagreement. It's important that feelings about the specific issue come up, but not about old issues.

Third, the couple negotiates until they can agree. Sometimes all they can agree on is that they disagree. Negotiation includes give and take. It's not helpful for one person to say, "You're the one who wants the house clean. You clean it." Then there is no give and take.

### **Be Honest**

One common mistake is denying the other person's feelings. Avoid statements such as "You don't feel..." Be honest. If possible, admit that you might be wrong or might have done the behavior you're discussing. You'll both feel less defensive. Don't assume your partner is "out to get you." Assume your partner wants you to be happy. "Cooperate" means "work together." A spirit of cooperation

helps you work together on solving a problem, not battling each other. Put yourself in your partner's shoes. What does the problem look like now? Many couples let their arguments build: "You interrupted me again!" "Well, you don't listen. What do you expect?" Stop and count to 10, or take a 10-minute breather. You can lower the tension level to help you focus again on the real issue.

### **Remember Why You Like Each Other**

Often children, jobs or other obligations leave couples little time together. They've forgotten how much they once liked each other. Make a list of things you enjoy doing together. Schedule a weekly date to do something on your list. Spending special time together will let you like each other more. Then you'll be less likely to argue and, when you do, it will be friendlier. 