

# Fair Fighting Rules

## **Before you begin, ask yourself why you feel upset.**

Are you angry because you think it's unfair that your mom won't let you go to the party until you clean your room? Or are you angry because you feel like your parents don't trust you? Take time to think about your own feelings before starting an argument.

## **Discuss one topic at a time.**

Don't let "You can't go this party" turn into "You never let me go any place or do anything." Discussions that get off-topic are more likely to get heated, and less likely to solve the original problem. Choose one topic and stick to it.

## **No degrading language.**

Discuss the issue, not the person. No put-downs, swearing, or name-calling. Degrading language is an attempt to express negative feelings while making sure others feels just as bad. Doing so leads to more character attacks while the original issue is forgotten.

## **Express your feelings with words.**

"I feel hurt when you ignore my phone calls." "I feel scared when you yell." Structure your sentences as "I" statements ("I feel *emotion* when *event*") to express how you feel while taking responsibility for your emotions. However, starting with "I" does not give a license to ignore the other fair fighting rules.

"Why won't you let me go to the party!? It's so unfair — all my friends are going! Their parents trust them and treat them like real people. You never let me do anything fun. Why are you so strict?" These statements may make your parent less likely to see your perspective and it often does not convey your true thoughts in a productive way. Here's an alternative option using an "I statement": "When I'm not allowed to go to events that my friends are going to, I feel like I'm not trusted or responsible, which I find really frustrating. I'd like a chance to show I can handle myself in these situations."

## **Take turns speaking.**

Give your full attention to one another even if you believe your opinion is right; never deny someone else's right to their emotions. Show that you can take a step back and look at the situation from the outside. Your only job is to understand their point of view, even if you disagree. If you find it difficult to not interrupt, try setting a timer allowing 1-2 minutes for each person to speak without interruption.

## **No stonewalling.**

Sometimes, the easiest way to respond to an argument is to retreat into your shell and refuse to speak. You could avoid the situation and sneak out and go to the party anyway, which may seem like a real option in the heat of anger. But when you really think it through, it's pretty unlikely you'd get away with being gone for hours with no one noticing. And when you do get caught, things will just get worse.

**No yelling.**

You could yell at Mom and throw a fit, which may get you in worse trouble or even grounded. Yelling does not help anyone see your point of view. Instead, it sends the message that only your words matter. Even if yelling intimidates your mom into letting you go, the underlying problem only grows worse.

**Take a time-out if things get too heated.**

What is your best choice? In a perfect world, we would all follow these rules 100% of the time...but it just doesn't work like that. If an argument starts to become personal or heated, communicate that you need a break. Agree on a time to come back and discuss the problem after everyone has cooled down.

**Attempt to come to a compromise or an understanding.**

There isn't always a perfect answer to an argument. Life is too messy for that. Do your best to come to a compromise (this means some give and take from both sides). If you can't come to a compromise, simply taking the time to understand the other person's perspective can help soothe negative feelings.

Once the situation is over, spend some time thinking about how it went. **Ask yourself:** How did I do? Did things work out as I expected? If not, why not? Am I satisfied with the choice I made? Taking some time to reflect on how things worked out after it's all over is a very important step. It helps you learn about yourself and it allows you to test which problem-solving approaches work best in different situations.