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Dating & Hooking Up

Be a Better Fighter

Sometimes fights are unavoidable — you disagree with your friend over a crush, you fight with your honey 'cause he's been paying too much attention to the new girl, or you have a heated argument with your buddy about why he didn't invite you to the party on Saturday night.

Are arguments a good way to clear the air, things to be avoided altogether, or a sign that your relationship/friendship has some serious problems? It's all in the approach. You may never be able to live a fight-free life, but you can take steps to make conflict less stressful and more productive.

Round One

The first step in positive conflict resolution is to decide when to fight — and what's worth fighting for. For some, arguing over small issues isn't worth the hurt feelings. Adam, 16, advises choosing your battles carefully.

"I usually think about it for a bit until I actually get a handle on what we are arguing about," Adam says. "Then I think of a reason I'm right. If nothing pops into my head, then there is no reason to argue and I apologize. If it is something that I know is stupid to argue about then I steer around it."

Sure, maybe you did call dibs on that last slice of pizza ... but do you really want to make a major issue of it?

Fight Time Tips

So what do you do if you find yourself fighting? Start by trying to be cool, calm, and collected. Bullying, blaming, and yelling won't get you anywhere.

Tian Dayton, Ph.D., author of *It's My Life!: A Power Journal for Teens*, offers a few more guidelines:

> Talk it out. Set aside some time to calmly talk about how you feel. Try to talk about your feelings rather than the other person's behavior. "Express hurt or angry feelings clearly, and recognize that you need to listen to your friends' hurt and angry feelings, too," Dr. Dayton says. Remember that one of the most important parts of any discussion is listening. When the other person is talking, really listen to what is being said. Don't just think about your next response.
> Take responsibility for your actions. It's helpful if you can figure out if you are at fault in the situation. It's unlikely that you're totally right and the other person is totally wrong! It's easier for the other person to apologize if you apologize for your part. You may not have even

realized that something you did was hurtful. Once the apologies are out there, it's easier to find a resolution.

Do damage control. "Don't be afraid to apologize if you've hurt someone, or to ask for an apology," Dayton advises. You may even have to apologize for something you don't necessarily think was wrong but still hurt your friend's feelings. You also want to make sure that you've come to an agreement about how a similar situation should be handled in the future — to prevent this sort of sticky situation from happening again.

Know When to Say When

If you find yourself constantly fighting with a friend or significant other, you might be trapped in a pattern of negative interaction — especially if things never seem to change. If the friend or partner constantly picks fights, refuses to compromise, or insults you, you may want to rethink the relationship.

And if physical aggression is part of the equation, it's never okay. Everyone gets angry sometimes, but no one ever deserves to be physically hurt for any reason. Someone who is violent toward another person needs to get help. Trust your instincts. If you feel you are being treated badly, you probably are.

If the other person is abusive, it's best to get out as soon as you can. But when friendships are failing for other reasons, Dayton advises to make the break more gradually — start spending less and less time together. It's possible that in time, you might feel enough healing has occurred to try to be friends again — or you both may have just moved on.

"Some friendships of mine have ended, and we went our own separate directions and are now quite different," says Adam. "But we don't hate each other at all." Letting go of someone you care about can be tough, but if you take steps to make fighting more constructive and less hurtful, there's less of a chance that it'll come to that. Fighting doesn't always feel good, but it doesn't have to be the end of the world — or even the end of a relationship.

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