



Fair-Fighting Rules

Disagree without damage — ground rules for the hard conversations.

Conflict itself doesn't harm relationships — how we handle it does. Research on lasting relationships points to a few real culprits: contempt, stonewalling, defensiveness, and harsh criticism. Agreeing on a few ground rules ahead of time, and knowing how to call a timeout before things escalate, lets you work through disagreements without wounding each other.

Ground rules to agree on

- One issue at a time — don't pile on old grievances.
- No name-calling, contempt, or sarcasm.
- Use "I" statements; speak to your own experience.
- Take turns — listen to understand, then reflect back what you heard.
- Either person can call a timeout; agree when you'll resume.
- Aim for a repair, not a "win."

Our timeout plan

Our timeout signal	
What each of us does during a timeout to cool down	
When we'll come back to it	

Bring this worksheet to your next appointment.