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CONFLICT RESOLUTION

# Conflict Without Casualties

How to disagree without destroying. De-escalation techniques, fair fighting rules, and repair strategies that actually work.

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Boundary Agreement Resource Library

Dr. Hines Inc. | [boundaryagreement.com](https://boundaryagreement.com)

This guide is a coaching resource, not therapy or counseling.

# Why This Matters

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Every couple fights. The difference between couples who make it and couples who don't is not whether they argue. It's **how** they argue. Research consistently shows that the way conflict is handled predicts relationship satisfaction more than the number of disagreements.

If your assessment showed a mismatch in Conflict Resolution, this is not a death sentence. It means you and your partner experience conflict differently, and you need a shared framework for navigating it.

This guide gives you that framework. No theory. No fluff. Just practical tools you can use the next time things get heated.

**IMPORTANT:** If you or your partner are experiencing physical violence, threats, or feel unsafe, this guide is not sufficient. Contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or text START to 88788.

## The Four Destroyers of Conflict

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Dr. John Gottman identified four communication patterns that predict the end of a relationship with over 90% accuracy. If any of these show up in your arguments, it is critical to recognize and replace them.

### 1. Criticism

Attacking your partner's character instead of addressing the specific behavior. 'You never listen' vs 'I felt unheard when I was talking about my day.'

**Replace with:** Use 'I feel' statements focused on a specific situation, not a character judgment.

### 2. Contempt

Mocking, eye-rolling, sarcasm, name-calling, or speaking from a position of superiority. This is the single strongest predictor of divorce.

**Replace with: Build a culture of respect. Express frustration without implying your partner is beneath you.**

### 3. Defensiveness

Denying responsibility, making excuses, or counter-attacking when your partner raises a concern. 'Well you do it too' is not a response.

**Replace with: Take responsibility for even a small part of the issue. 'You're right, I could have handled that better.'**

### 4. Stonewalling

Shutting down, walking away mid-conversation, giving the silent treatment, or emotionally checking out.

**Replace with: Say 'I need a break to calm down. I'll come back in 30 minutes.' Then actually come back.**

# The Fair Fighting Rules

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Print this page. Put it on the fridge. Before your next argument, read it together. These rules are not suggestions. They are the boundary.

## **Rule 1: Stay on topic.**

Address one issue at a time. Do not bring up past arguments, past mistakes, or unrelated complaints. If a new issue comes up, write it down and discuss it later.

## **Rule 2: No name-calling. Period.**

The moment you call your partner a name, you have lost the argument. It doesn't matter if you were right about the issue. Name-calling causes damage that outlasts the argument.

## **Rule 3: Use 'I feel' not 'You always.'**

'I feel unheard when...' opens a door. 'You never listen' slams it shut. Describe your experience, not their character.

## **Rule 4: Either person can call a pause.**

If emotions are escalating, either person can say 'I need 30 minutes.' This is not avoidance. The person who calls the pause is responsible for restarting the conversation within 2 hours.

## **Rule 5: No audience.**

Arguments happen in private. Not in front of the kids, not in front of friends, not on social media. If your partner raises an issue in public, say 'Let's talk about this at home.'

## **Rule 6: Touch base after.**

After a conflict is resolved, check in within 24 hours. 'How are you feeling about yesterday?' This prevents resentment from building underground.

## **Rule 7: Repair is not optional.**

Someone has to go first. It does not matter who was wrong. If you wait for your partner to repair, you may wait forever. Be the one who reaches out.

# De-Escalation Techniques

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When you feel your heart rate rising, your voice getting louder, or your thoughts racing to 'win' the argument, you are flooded. Your body has entered fight-or-flight mode. Rational conversation is no longer possible.

**You need to get your nervous system back online before you say something you cannot take back.**

## The 6-Second Pause

Before responding, silently count to six. This interrupts the reactive pattern. It feels like an eternity in the moment. It is worth it.

## Name Your Emotion

Say out loud: 'I'm feeling angry right now' or 'I'm feeling defensive.' Naming the emotion reduces its power. It also signals to your partner that you are self-aware.

## Lower Your Volume

Consciously drop your voice below normal speaking volume. When both people are yelling, nobody is listening. The person who gets quieter gains more influence, not less.

## Sit Down

If you're standing, sit down. If your partner is standing, ask them to sit with you. Standing during an argument activates the body's threat response. Sitting reduces it.

## The Repair Attempt

In the middle of the argument, say something that reminds you both you're on the same team: 'I love you and I want to figure this out.' This is not weakness. It is strength.

**PRO TIP:** Track your arguments for one week. Write down the trigger, how it escalated, and what ended it. Patterns will emerge. Patterns can be broken.

# Exercises

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## EXERCISE: The Conflict Autopsy

Think about your last argument. Answer these questions honestly. If possible, have your partner do the same exercise separately, then compare.

**What was the actual issue we were arguing about?**

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**When did it stop being about the issue and become personal?**

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**What did I say that I regret?**

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**What was I actually feeling underneath the anger?**

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**What would I do differently next time?**

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## EXERCISE: The 48-Hour Repair Challenge

For the next 48 hours after any disagreement, intentionally do one repair action within 2 hours. Track it below.

**What was the disagreement about?**

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**What repair action did I take?**

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**How did my partner respond?**

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**How did I feel after repairing?**

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