

Fighting?? We're Not Fighting . . . We're Just Discussing!

What's the difference between a fight, a discussion, and an argument? In a close relationship, we will have disagreements — conflicts. There is no question about that. In the following, we use the terms "discussion," "argument" and "fight," but what we call those disagreements or conflicts is less important than how we react to them. This exercise won't discuss hitting or verbal abuse — those are unacceptable. If they are part of your way of handling conflicts, then this exercise won't help you.

Step 1. Check one box in each row, indicating which phrase best describes your conflict resolution style. You should check a total of twelve boxes.

A Discussion	An Argument	A Fight
<input type="checkbox"/> Each person is allowed to present his or her points and seeks to understand the other's points	<input type="checkbox"/> Each person seeks to present his or her points but does not try to understand the other.	<input type="checkbox"/> Each person ignores the other's points.
<input type="checkbox"/> Each listens to the other's point of view.	<input type="checkbox"/> There is little listening, each thinking about countering what the other is saying.	<input type="checkbox"/> There is no listening. Each person is talking, often at the same time.
<input type="checkbox"/> Multiple solutions are considered.	<input type="checkbox"/> Each wants to impose his or her predetermined solution.	<input type="checkbox"/> Each insists that there is only one possible solution.
<input type="checkbox"/> Each wants to get to a solution that satisfies both.	<input type="checkbox"/> Each wants his or her solution.	<input type="checkbox"/> Each insists that his or her solution be implemented.
<input type="checkbox"/> Winning is not a consideration.	<input type="checkbox"/> Each wants to win regardless of the solution.	<input type="checkbox"/> Each person wants to win at any costs.
<input type="checkbox"/> Focus is on the current problem.	<input type="checkbox"/> Both tend to bring up past problems and past actions.	<input type="checkbox"/> Usually the current problem masks more important issues such as control feelings of inadequacy.
<input type="checkbox"/> Both stay on the point.	<input type="checkbox"/> Focus strays to other issues. Both tend to bring up points which relate to unresolved issues.	<input type="checkbox"/> The issue gets lost in discussion of past hurts. Anything that supports the speaker is brought up. Often the original points are forgotten.

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(continued)

A Discussion	An Argument	A Fight
<input type="checkbox"/> Both deal with the specific problem or behavior.	<input type="checkbox"/> One or both use "always" and "never."	<input type="checkbox"/> The issues get lost in "always," "never" and other generalities.
<input type="checkbox"/> Tends to be at normal volume and normal tones of voice.	<input type="checkbox"/> Tends to have raised voices and unpleasant tones of voice.	<input type="checkbox"/> Loud voices and shouting are common. Name calling, swearing, put-downs and labels are very common.
<input type="checkbox"/> Emotional level is low.	<input type="checkbox"/> Emotions are high.	<input type="checkbox"/> One or both are afraid.
<input type="checkbox"/> Feelings are legitimate input to the discussion.	<input type="checkbox"/> Feelings are not allowed as input.	<input type="checkbox"/> Feelings are put down or ridiculed.
<input type="checkbox"/> A decision is usually reached which is satisfactory to both.	<input type="checkbox"/> Decisions are seldom reached. When a decision is reached it is usually satisfactory to one.	<input type="checkbox"/> Decisions are rarely reached, though one person may take action. The other is left out and resents and will usually sabotage the actions.

Step 2. Exchange papers with your partner. Discuss both papers to be sure that both you and your partner fully understand why each partner checked particular boxes.

Step 3. Looking at both lists, pick two or three items that are checked in the fight column, and discuss how you can both modify your behavior to move toward discussion. If none are checked, pick two or three from the argument column, and agree to work on those.

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