

Dirty Fighting Techniques Handout from *The Inevitability of Conflict*

1. **Timing** - Pick the right time to begin an argument. Late at night, during a favorite TV show, after several drinks, or just before your spouse has to leave for work are options. As a general rule, look for the time your spouse least expects it or is least able to respond.
2. **Escalating** - Move quickly from the issue, to questioning of personality, to wondering whether it is worth the effort to stay together (issue to personality to relationship). Interpret your spouse's shortcomings as evidence of bad faith and the impossibility of a happy relationship.
3. **Brown Bagging** - Try to list as many problems in as much detail as possible. Don't stick to the original issue, but rather throw in all the problems you can think of. Don't limit yourself to the present. If your partner can't recall the offense, so much the better.
4. **Overgeneralizing** - Use words like "always" and "never" as in "You are always late." This is likely to distract your partner into discussing the overgeneralization rather than the issue and insure further misunderstandings.
5. **Cross-complaining** - Respond to any complaint your spouse may raise with one of your own. For example, "Me late? Why, if it weren't for the fact that you never have any clean clothes for me...." If done properly you can balance complaint against complaint forever.
6. **Crucializing** - Exaggerate the importance of the issue with statements such as "If you really loved us, you would never have done it in the first place" or "This proves that you don't care." Never concede that an issue is not absolutely critical and in need of immediate resolution.
7. **Asking Why** - "Why didn't you clean up?" or "Why were you late?" will imply that there must be something terribly wrong with your spouse and that something more than simple problem behavior that might be easily resolved is at issue.
8. **Blaming** - Make it clear that the fault lies entirely with your spouse and that once again you are simply the innocent victim. Don't admit that your behavior plays any part in the difficulty. Make sure your spouse realizes that you will not change first.
9. **Pulling Rank** - Rather than depend on the merits of your argument, pull rank by reminding your partner that you make more money, have more education, are older or younger, or are wiser or more experienced in such matters. Anything that will enhance your status at your spouse's expense should be considered.
10. **Not Listening, Dominating** - Any time you appear to be listening you run the risk of suggesting that you value your partner's opinion. Consider talking while your spouse is talking, pretending to read, or falling asleep.
11. **Listing Injustices** - This is a great morale builder. By reciting every slight injustice or inequity you have suffered in the relationship, you will experience a renewed sense of self-righteousness. You can use this approach to justify almost any activity you have always wanted to engage in. For example, "Since you went ahead and bought that dress, I can buy a new car."

12. **Labeling** - By labeling somebody in a negative manner, you can create the impression that that person is totally at fault. Psychological labels, such as "childish," "neurotic," "insecure," or "alcoholic," are particularly effective in obscuring issues where you may be vulnerable.
13. **Mind - reading** - By deciding that you know the *real* reasoning why someone is acting in a certain way, you can avoid having to debate issues. For example, "You only said that to set me up" or "You don't really feel that way" are particularly effective.
14. **Fortune - telling** - Predicting the future can save you the effort of really trying to resolve problems. "You will never change" or "It would be easy for me to change, but you won't live up to it" are statements that can protect you from having to make any efforts at all.
15. **Being Sarcastic** - This is a great way of saying something without having to take responsibility for it. If you can say, "You're so smart..." just right, you can imply that your spouse is stupid and deny that you said it at the same time.
16. **Avoiding Responsibility** - Although not a very elegant tactic, saying "I don't remember" can bring the discussion to an abrupt halt. Alcohol or fatigue can serve the same purpose as in "I must have been drunk."
17. **Leaving** - No problem is so big or important that it can't be ignored. Walk out of the room, leave home, or just refuse to talk. Sometimes just threatening to leave can accomplish the same ends without the inconvenience involved in actually leaving.
18. **Rejecting Compromise** - Don't back down. Why settle for compromise when with a little luck you can really devastate your spouse (and destroy the relationship). Stick with the "one winner" philosophy.
19. **Personalizing** - Anybody can resolve a conflict by sticking to the issue. Shift to personalities and you should be able to generate enough defensiveness to keep the conflict going forever.
20. **Playing the Martyr** - If timed properly, this tactic can completely disorient the opposition. "You're right dear, I am hopeless" can stop your spouse cold. And example of a less subtle form is "How could you say that after all I've done for you?" An extreme form is to threaten to kill yourself if your spouse doesn't shape up.
21. **Using Money** - "If you made as much money as..." or "When you make as much as I do, then you can have an opinion" are old favorites.
22. **Using Children** - "If you spent more time with them, they wouldn't be failing" or "Do you want them to grow up like you?" can always be used unless you are so unfortunate as to have perfect children.
23. **Using Relatives** - "When you do that, you are just like your mother" can be used to break your spouse's concentration and undermine confidence.

24. ***Giving Advice*** - By telling people how to act, think, and feel, you can maintain a position of superiority while insisting that you are only trying to be helpful.
25. ***Getting Even*** - Don't settling for a compromise or an apology. Hold grudges for as long as possible; you might need those complaints in future arguments.
26. ***Using Terminal Language*** - For example, if you happen to be upset by the fact that the room wasn't straightened, start with "you slob..." to suggest that it is your spouse's existence and not behavior that is at question.
27. ***Being Inconsistent*** - Keep your spouse off balance by changing your position. Try complaining that your spouse never talks to you and then ignore whatever your spouse says.
28. ***Others*** - This list should only be considered suggestive of the range of tactics to be drawn from. With patience and creativity, you should be able to come up with numerous innovations.