

Boundaries for a Fair Fight:

1. No name-calling.
2. No labeling. “You’re just like your father/mother.”
3. No sarcasm. “Oh, you are so trying, yeah right.”
4. No silent treatments instead of talking things out.
5. No hitting below the belt—pushing “sensitive buttons.”
6. No bringing up the past—building a case for your point of view doesn’t solve the issue.
7. No “always/never”—absolutes like these undermine progress and are highly unlikely to be true.

What about past conflicts or current missteps where you could catch yourself in the midst of an error in judgment by saying, “Can I have a do-over? I’m not happy with how I handled that.” Gay Hendricks and Mat Boggs also suggest the Ten-Minute Sweaty Conversation as outlined below.

The Ten-Minute Sweaty Conversation:

1. Set the intention: “I would like to have a ten-minute conversation; is now a good time? My intention is to grow and be better with you.”
2. Here’s what I see: Tone down the emotion; stick to facts. “I see a pattern in our conflicts.”
3. This is how I feel: “I’m getting scared I will lose you when you drive away in the middle of a disagreement.” Feelings will have a word such as sad, mad, or overwhelmed. Do not say, “You made me feel.” No one can make you feel; you decide how you feel based on your thoughts. It’s an inside job.

4. Here's what I would love: "When conflict arises, and you need to leave, I would feel less scared knowing (with my thoughts) you are coming back in a reasonable short while that allows you to cool and me to feel less abandoned."
5. What would you love? "I'm not sure how much time I will need to cool off, but we can try thirty minutes to start."
6. A new agreement: "I agree to give you space for thirty minutes so we can have a healthier conversation and help us grow."

What happens when you go too far and realize you are at fault? An apology that comes with, "I'm sorry but..." isn't an apology. Mary Morrissey suggests using the following perfect apology formula.

The Perfect Apology Formula:

1. Here's what happened: "I didn't express my true feelings."
2. Take Responsibility: "I allowed stress to build, and my anger wasn't fair to you."
3. Here's what I am doing to fix it: "I am learning ways to manage stress."
4. Here's my plan to keep it from happening again.

Note: When using the above conversation tools, don't forget to take calming breaths.

"Never forget the nine most important words in any family—I
love you, you are beautiful, please forgive me."

— H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

a note where you brush your teeth, on your shower, on your door, on your desk, or in your vehicle to remind you of what to do when resentment rises. You remove everyday tartar buildup, so do the same with any negative emotional buildup—rinse and repeat with forgiveness. It might be needed daily. Don't forget to include forgiving yourself.

I forgive you completely.

I free you from our past.

I accept healing now.

SUMMARY

I devoted an entire chapter to forgiveness, conflict, and communication tools—it is that important. Like vegetables, forgiveness' benefits are worth it even when it seems to taste bitter. Healing comes from the inside, and as long as you are breathing, you and others will make mistakes. Relationships are preordained, and so are stress-induced conflicts, hurts, and fears. Forgiveness, apologies, healthy communication, and boundaries are for your benefit in the end. Buried feelings can morph from uneasiness to addiction to disease. Reciting a forgiveness affirmation is worth it for the release; as Vonda McDermott Certified Life Coach says, it's not a one and done, but a daily rinse and repeat soul-cleansing. More than helping with your diet, healthy relationships are here to teach love and provide a mirror for you to see yourself while shining a light on self-love.

“Put down the flashlight; pick up the mirror.”

— Gay Hendricks