

## Smart Heart Steps to Fighting Fair

Initially, you need to practice these skills with small and less volatile issues to get the hang of them. Think of it as “on-the-relationship training.”

- Ask permission; set a time-limited (ten minutes to start), mutually agreeable appointment and keep it.
- Enclose yourselves in your bubbles and put on your bulletproof vests and fluffy boxing gloves.
- Raise your right hands and pledge: “I will make it safe for you and I will not be hurt by your script, words, or emotions.”
- Block out your own thoughts and feelings and listen to your partner.
- Don’t say “What about me?”
- Echo what your partner said back to him or her to make sure you understood. (These simple skills can eliminate countless misunderstandings.)
- Walk in your partner’s shoes. Make him or her feel safe—no criticism or zingers.
- Stretch! Go beyond your comfort zone. Agree to give your partner three changes in behavior that are not easy for you.
- Do not “give to get.” Do not ask your partner to make any changes when it’s your turn to offer your own.
- When your partner relates an experience with a particularly charged emotion, ask when she or he felt this way before, such as from childhood or with an ex-spouse (**do not throw this vulnerability up later in the dialogue or at any time**).
- Before, during, and after each fight, give each other attachment skills such as hugging, kissing, stroking each other’s hair, and gazing into each other’s eyes. Also engage in “high-energy play” like pillow fighting (a la Dr. Hendrix), wrestling, exercising together, or having sex to create endorphins and reverse the flow of negative emotions.