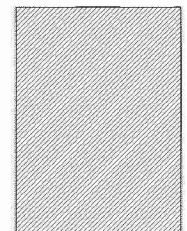


Love & Lust

Say the right thing and his defenses will come down.

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Feel Closer After a Fight

They're upsetting, annoying, and the perfect way to screw up quality time together. But with the right approach, experts say, conflicts between you and your guy can boost your bond (and we're not just talking makeup booty).

By Korin Miller

There's no denying it: Fighting with your boyfriend or husband sucks. No matter who wins the argument, you still feel like you both lost out. And we know how important it is to you to keep the good vibes going strong in your relationship. In a recent cosmopolitan.com poll, the majority of you said that your number one love concern is maintaining a close emotional connection with your guy.

The first thing to keep in mind is that arguments don't have to drive a wedge between the two of you. In fact, they can do the exact opposite. "Unfortunately, conflict is the price we pay for a deeper level of intimacy," says Les Parrott, PhD, author of *Love Talk*. "But if you know how to fight a good fight, it can actually bring you closer because you're able to lay out what's bothering you and work through your problems together."

Productive sparring is all about avoiding below-the-belt blows and making a real effort to understand each other's opposing views. Of course, that can be tough to pull off when the gloves are on, so we talked to experts to get tips on everything you

WADLEY, Senior fashion editor: Rebecca Hessel Cohen. Hair: Christopher Marrero at ION Studio. Makeup: Sarah Graahman for Dior. Manicure: Kim Chiu for Mark Edward Inc. (On him) shirt: Calvin Klein. (On her) sweater: 7 for All Mankind; dress: Lulu's.

should say and do so that after a tiff, you'll feel like even more of a team. Since the way you should respond varies by situation, we broke down their advice by the fights we know you probably already have encountered... and likely will again.

THE PREWORK SPAT

It's way too freaking early to get into it, so of course, you do. And naturally, one of you has to leave just when things are heating up.

In the moment: Resist the urge to storn out, leaving a satisfying door slam in your wake, says New York City couples

You Know a Couple Spat Is Out of Control When...

- The dog is now shivering under the couch...and so are your dinner-party guests.
- He requested a snack break between rounds 9 and 10.
- You've stopped crying and started grinning like a maniac.
- The neighbors asked if you could turn down the *Rock of Love* marathon.
- He's regressed so much, he just called you a "meanie."
- You finally told him how much you hated the way he sucked on his straw on your first date.
- There's a red spot on his forehead from him banging it against the wall.
- You've moved on from his mom issues to his grandma issues.
- His iPhone is on the lawn outside the window...
- ...And you're in the process of unhooking his Xbox.
- You accused him of "projecting," even though you have no idea what it means.
- You had makeup sex three times already.

counselor Rachel Sussman. Instead, say "I'm sorry we started the day like this, but I need to go to work now," and then leave before either of you has a chance to say anything else.

Pausing the argument in this level-headed way is crucial. Your change in tone will prevent tension from continuing to build while you're apart.

After the fact: Trying to continue the debate over e-mail or text once you get to work is a definite no-no. It's too easy for both of you to misinterpret what the other is saying and make things even worse. The one message you should send, though, is this simple text: "I just want you to know that I love you." Saying "I love you"—even when you're ticked off—sends a powerful (and disarming) message that you're there for him no matter what, says Parrott.

On your way home, think about why the convo went south and what part you may have played in it, Sussman recommends. Then try to come up with a strategy for getting your point across that won't put him on the defensive. For example, if you were bitching that he never goes grocery shopping, turn your complaint into a request: "It would make me really happy if we could sit down together and figure out how to divvy up food responsibilities." Being positive and stressing that you're in it together will make him want to talk, not fight.

THE BLOWUP IN FRONT OF YOUR FAMILY

Visiting your family is challenging enough (especially during the holidays). Duking it out with your guy as everyone else watches turns it into pure hell.

In the moment: No matter how stressful this may be for you, it's worse for your guy because he's an outsider. Even though you may be tempted to grab your sister and gripe about what a jerk he was for making an inappropriate joke in front of your dad, it's key to keep

the fight to yourself because you don't want to turn everyone against him, says Sussman. Plus, you have your support system with you. He doesn't.

If the bickering starts in front of your family, remove yourselves from the situation ASAP with something like "Oh, hey, can you help me grab that heavy bag out of the car?" followed by a meaningful look. When you're in private, say "This family stuff is a little overwhelming, but I want you to feel comfortable. Let's call a truce for now and pick this up afterward. Deal?"

After the fact: Before you bring up the topic again, thank your guy for spending time with your folks—it'll put him in a better frame of mind, says Terri Orbuch, PhD, author of *Five Simple Steps to Take Your Marriage From Good to Great*. Then explain why you got so ticked off, admitting that family pressures probably made your reaction worse.

Once you've talked things out, let your guy know that whether you're visiting your parents or his, your first priority always should be to come across as a team, says Parrott. That means sticking up for each other instead of going head-to-head. "Being able to do this has a payoff for your future because your family will see you as a great couple and support you even more going forward," he says.

THE FACTOID FIGHT

You know Jay-Z's *The Black Album* was released after *The Blueprint*, but your guy swears it's the other way around. Somehow, your cute little debate turns into an all-out war.

In the moment: You're both equally miffed and refusing to back down, so the smartest thing you can do is change the subject temporarily, Parrott says. Try "Until we get near a computer and find out who's right, I'm not saying another word about it."

After the fact: When you get a definitive answer, one of you is sure to be left with a bruised ego, and you'll both be



Now this is our kind of face-off.

embarrassed about how little it really mattered. So make a lighthearted comment, like “Don’t worry. I’m sure I’ll/you’ll be right next time.”

Then give the tiff some thought. Fights over tiny details typically explode because both partners are feeling underappreciated, says Parrott. Suggest that you do something together that will really allow you to focus on each other, says Orbach, like going out for a romantic dinner at a quiet restaurant. Purposefully steer the conversation toward why you admire and respect each other and whatever misgivings you have about not being valued will fade.

THE DRUNKEN THROW-DOWN AT A PARTY

You started arguing sometime after the crab-puff appetizers—and your second round of vodka sodas—began to disappear.

In the moment: Beer goggles do more than make cute people look hot. They can turn semi-annoying comments into flat-out insults. And any attempt to make things right probably will just add to the anger and confusion.

If you can get your temper under control, say something like “Hey, we’ve been drinking. Why don’t we shelve this until tomorrow and focus on having fun tonight?” says Orbach. If you’re already too worked up to be nice, excuse yourself to mingle with your friends or freshen up in the bathroom. While you’re away from your guy, force yourself to think of three nice things he’s done for you lately—a surefire way to transform fury into warm-and-fuzzy feelings, says Orbach. Then come back with a smile and a peace offering, like a yummy treat you can share.

After the fact: Odds are, you’ll wake up the next morning and realize that the fight was totally unfounded. Regardless, you’re both probably still feeling a little distant from each other. Sussman recommends acknowledging that by saying “I’m sorry if I said anything hurtful last night, and I would love to put the whole thing behind us,” which should prompt your guy to say the same thing.

If things still feel off, try using humor to clear the air. Suggest picking a funny word or phrase that you can throw out the next time you are tipsy at a party and start getting irritated with each

other. The goofier the phrase, the better. Coming up with a solution to the problem together increases the production of the cuddle hormone oxytocin in both of your bods, making your already tight union even more solid, says Parrott. And being able to laugh at yourselves is a great way to get past any lingering hard feelings.

THE MONEY BATTLE

You protested after he blew a ton of money on a swanky new 3-D TV, and then he had the nerve to bring up the pricey girls-only getaway you took last month...

In the moment: These spats can spin out of control—fast. As soon as you realize you’re arguing over money, ask your guy “Wait, what are we really talking about here?”

“Fights about finances almost always have deeper meaning because money is a major symbol of power and control,” says Parrott. The fact that you chose to go away for a weekend with your friends instead of with him may have made him feel like you have the upper hand in the relationship, while you might be mad that he didn’t consult you before doing something significant, like spending a lot of cash from your joint bank account.

After the fact: As soon as you drop the topic of cash flow and start discussing emotions, you’ll get to the root of the issue pretty quickly, says Orbach. And while you’re at it, she recommends having an honest conversation about your family’s attitudes toward money when you were growing up. We tend to inherit money-related insecurities from our parents, so opening up about the subject will help you both get a greater understanding of where the other comes from.

Once you know what money really represents to each of you, you can both keep that in the back of your minds and be more careful to tread lightly on each other’s hot-button issues...and avoid more fights in the future. ■

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