

solutions

FIGHTING FAIR

In today's society, parents face the challenge of regulating their own feelings of anger, frustration, and worry while balancing the demands of the high cost of living, work, family, and romantic partnership. It is important for families to be able to tell each other how they feel and what they think, even when they disagree. There is no such thing as a relationship entirely free from conflict and disagreement, and all children see their parents argue at one time or another. When parents relate to each other calmly and positively even during a disagreement, solve the problem together, and show children through their subsequent interactions that the conflict has been resolved, then the children may be unaffected and perhaps, even wiser. Having arguments once in a while can be healthy if it helps you get feelings out in the open instead of bottling them up inside and ultimately, people usually understand each other better and feel closer following a "fair" fight.

On the other hand, exposure to severe verbal and/or physical aggression between parents may hurt a child's ability to identify and control their own emotions. When parental conflict is frequent, hostile, loud, or threatening, children often believe that the fighting is their fault and they develop a fear that they made their family fall apart. According to a longitudinal study led by C. Cybele Raver, professor of applied psychology at NYU Steinhardt writes:

"Our study points to ways in which aggression between parents may powerfully shape children's emotional adjustment." The findings revealed that prolonged exposure to aggression between parents was also linked to children's inability to regulate their own feelings of sadness, withdrawal and fear, placing them at greater risk for symptoms of anxiety and depression later on. Similar studies such as those conducted by J. Reynolds, reveal that there is also a higher incidence of "externalized distress" in these children as evidenced by: increased aggression and anti-social behavior. Lastly, Reynolds reports that "children from high-conflict homes are more likely to have poor interpersonal skills, problem solving abilities and social competence and conflict-ridden relationships in the future."

Ultimately, children learn what they live. Following a few simple rules during a fight can lead to healthier, happier relationships in the moment and in the future:

- Fight in private
- Stick to the subject
- Be honest and clear
- Be respectful
- Exclude violent talk or actions
- Agree on a time limit
- Seek compromise and resolution

Resources:

NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, C.Raver

Parental Conflict: Outcomes and Interventions for Children and Families, J.Reynolds

PARENTS MATTER: *Teach your child respect, empathy, and conflict resolution: FIGHT FAIR*