

## Fair Fighting Rules

These rules are meant to guide respectful communication during conflict – especially when things get heated. They apply when someone becomes **abusive or disrespectful** (e.g., name-calling, swearing, physical aggression, or anything else your family agrees is not okay).

By practicing (and modeling!) the steps below, you are teaching your teen that **having a voice matters** – and that it can be done in a healthy, respectful way. These are skills that will help them navigate friendships, dating, school, and work.

### Key Principles

- **Feelings matter.**

Parents need to tolerate high levels of emotion in their teen at times. Even when you disagree, **acknowledge and validate** their feelings. Help them name and make sense of what's going on. Try questions like:

- “What are you feeling?”
- “What are you trying to say?”
- “What do you need?”
- “Help me understand.”

- **Big anger is okay.**

Even if it seems messy or intense, anger is a valid emotion. Stay calm and try to be comfortable with it – it's not the enemy.

### When Things Escalate

- If your teen is yelling or being abusive, their message gets lost.  
Let them know you want to hear them – but **they need to change the way they're communicating it** or take a **time-out** until they can communicate more effectively.
- If *you* feel overwhelmed, call a **time-out** yourself.
  - Say it out loud: “I need a time-out.”
  - Give a clear **time frame** for when you'll return.
  - Stick to it – this shows the other person they matter and the issue is important.
- If your teen calls a time-out, **respect it**.
  - Ask how long they need before reconnecting.
  - If they don't know, let them go – but let them know *you* will check in after a set time.
  - When you reconnect, your goal is to understand: “How are you feeling?” “Help me understand what's going on for you” “Can you tell me more about what's going on”

### Final Reminder

Teens should not have to tolerate abusive or disrespectful behaviour from parents either. Model what you want to see from them: respectful communication, listening, time-outs when needed, and following through.

### **Expect disagreement. Expect conflict.**

But also – commit to **resolving it**.