DIRTY FIGHTING

Recognize the tactic. Stop the cycle. Choose a better response.

WHAT MAKES A FIGHT "DIRTY"?

The goal shifts from solving a problem to winning at all costs. These tactics can leave the other person feeling degraded, guilty, ashamed, overwhelmed, or unable to make a fair case.

COMMON TACTICS TO RECOGNIZE AND STOP

1. **Bad Timing**
   Demanding a discussion when the other person is exhausted, busy, or unable to engage.
2. **Brown Bagging**
   Unloading many stored complaints all at once.
3. **Overgeneralizing**
   Using absolutes such as "always" or "never" instead of naming one behavior.
4. **Cross-Complaining**
   Avoiding responsibility by answering a concern with a complaint of your own.
5. **Blaming**
   Making the other person entirely responsible for the problem or your reaction.
6. **Pulling Rank**
   Using status or authority - "I am the man of the house" - instead of facts and respect.
7. **Not Listening**
   Interrupting, dismissing, rehearsing a comeback, or refusing to hear the other view.
8. **Listing Injustices**
   Reciting every past wrong to prove the present issue is unfair.
9. **Mind Reading**
   Claiming to know what another person thinks, feels, wants, or intends.
10. **Fortune Telling**
    Predicting failure: "You will never change."
11. **Sarcasm**
    Using ridicule, contempt, or cutting humor to wound or dismiss.
12. **Rejecting Compromise**
    Treating any middle ground as losing.
13. **Playing the Martyr**
    Using sacrifice or suffering to create guilt and obligation.
14. **Unwanted Advice**
    Directing the other person when they did not ask for help.
15. **Terminal Language**
    Threatening to end the relationship to force agreement or compliance.
16. **Lecturing**
    Talking down to the other person instead of having a two-way conversation.

THE RESET

Pause. Name one issue. Use specific facts. Speak for yourself. Listen to understand. Ask for a fair next step. Take a timed break if either person is overwhelmed.

CONTROL AND EMOTIONAL ABUSE

These are safety concerns - not ordinary communication mistakes.

CONFLICT IS NOT THE SAME AS ABUSE

Abusive and controlling behaviors are used to dominate, intimidate, isolate, punish, or harm. The person being targeted is not responsible for fixing the abuse through better communication.

RED FLAGS THAT REQUIRE ATTENTION

Threats and Intimidation

Threatening harm; menacing gestures or staring; harming pets; threatening people the partner cares about.

Isolation and Jealousy

Controlling contacts or movement; blocking exits; taking keys; monitoring, interrogating, or repeatedly accusing.

Economic Abuse

Controlling money or decisions; sabotaging work; hiding expenses; refusing agreed financial responsibilities.

Attacking Self-Esteem

Name-calling, humiliation, ridicule, sexual insults, public shaming, or convincing others the partner is “crazy.”

General Control

Ordering, nagging, refusing “no,” following and criticizing, or keeping someone awake to force a discussion.

Obsessive Intrusion

Harassing at work, following, repeated unwanted calls or messages, or persistent surveillance.

Punishment and Withdrawal

Ignoring, withholding affection or sex as punishment, locking someone out, sabotaging tasks, or threatening self-harm to control.

Using Children

Recruiting children against a parent, using them as spies, withholding contact, or interfering with family relationships.

Legal or Systems Abuse

Making knowingly false reports or using immigration, welfare, custody, or legal threats to frighten and control.

Sexual Coercion

Pressuring or forcing sexual activity. Forced sex is rape, including within a relationship or marriage.

CHOOSE SAFETY AND ACCOUNTABLE ACTION

If you are using these behaviors

Stop the behavior. Create distance if needed. Do not block, follow, threaten, monitor, or force contact. Take responsibility and seek specialized help.

If these behaviors are used against you

Prioritize safety. Talk with a trusted person or advocate. Document incidents when safe. Make a plan before confronting or leaving.

IMMEDIATE DANGER Call 911. In the U.S., the National Domestic Violence Hotline is available at 800-799-SAFE (7233) or thehotline.org. Use a safe device when possible.