The Dangers of Fighting Dirty

Sometimes people resort to destructive, “dirty fighting” in order to handle interpersonal conflict. There are a number of different “dirty fighting” techniques, and it can be tempting to use these techniques when in the midst of conflict with a significant other. Employing these techniques may enable you to “win” an argument or fight, but they can significantly damage your relationship over time. While you may succeed in winning the fight today, you may destroy your relationship in the end.

Once you recognize that you are engaging in “dirty fighting”, then you can make the decision to work on learning more constructive problem solving and communication skills (see our Constructive Problem Solving Handout).

A List of “Dirty Fighting” Techniques:

- Make “You” blaming statements instead of “I” statements.
- Exploit the other person’s weaknesses by “pushing their buttons.”
- Avoid the issue at hand by repeatedly changing the subject; in other words, practice “kitchen sinking.”
- Bring up past history to put the other person on the defensive and gain an advantage.
- Be unspecific, vague and hard to understand. Make broad negative generalizations. Use words like “you always” or “you never” a lot.
- Be critical. Assassinate the other person’s character (e.g. “you are so selfish and inconsiderate”). Compare them to undesirable people or personalities. Show contempt for the other person.
- Fake an argument about a trivial problem to avoid a confrontation about a real issue or problem.
- Psychoanalyze or attempt to read the other person’s mind; insist that you know what they are really thinking or feeling.
- Don’t listen when the other person is talking. Instead, prepare your arguments while they are still talking. Interrupt them to correct their errors.
- Shut down or stonewall the other person.
- Be angry and intimidating. Use threats, name calling, foul language, yelling, silence or violence instead of talking about feelings.