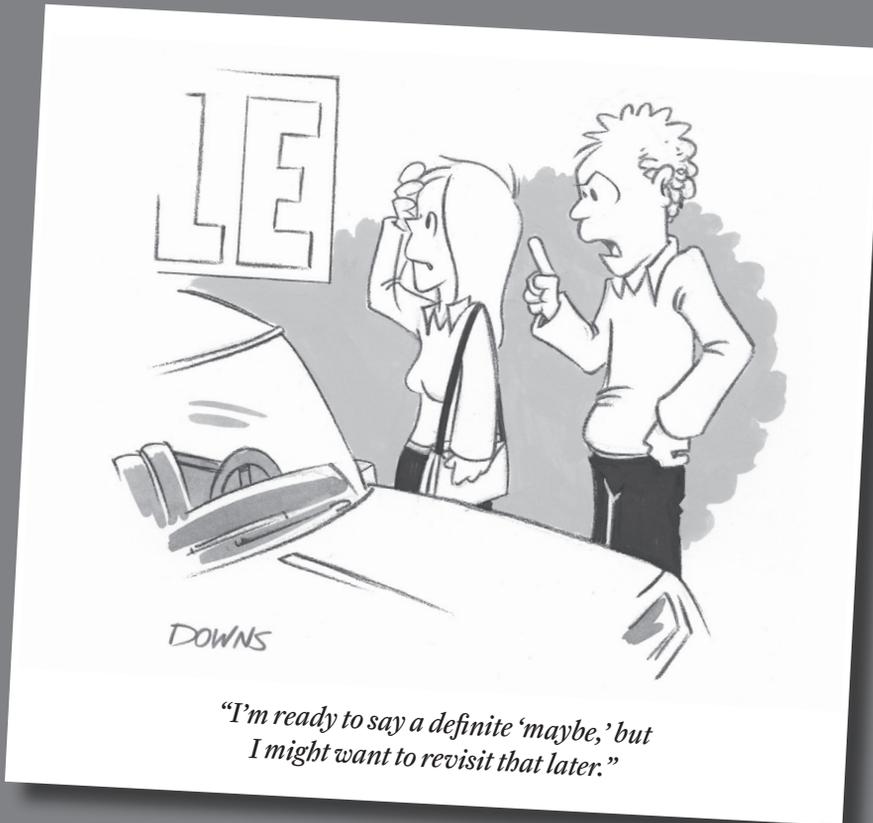


## CONTENTS

<b>1.</b>	A Game Without Rules .....	9
<b>2.</b>	Where Conflicts Come From .....	15
<b>3.</b>	The Object of the Game .....	23
<b>4.</b>	Why Play at All? .....	29
<b>5.</b>	Attitude Is Everything .....	33
<b>6.</b>	The Setup .....	39
<b>7.</b>	The Inner Game of Conflict .....	43
<b>8.</b>	Out with the Old Rules .....	49
<b>9.</b>	Passing the Dice .....	57
<b>10.</b>	Mastering the Endgame .....	69
<b>11.</b>	Follow-Through .....	81
<b>12.</b>	Who Let the Dogs Out? .....	85
<b>13.</b>	Putting It All Together .....	95
<b>14.</b>	Penalties and Fouls .....	105
<b>15.</b>	Being Your Own Referee .....	121
<b>16.</b>	Preventing Conflicts Before They Begin .....	131
<b>17.</b>	The Game That Never Ends .....	139
	APPENDIX A—Our Rules .....	144
	APPENDIX B—Attitude Is Everything .....	156
	Sources Cited .....	158
	Recommended Resources .....	161
	Acknowledgments .....	163

# A Game Without **RULES**



## A GAME WITHOUT RULES

**T**ry to imagine a game without rules.

Imagine a game of poker where one player holds five cards, but another holds eighteen. Imagine a game of Monopoly where you can rob the bank, break out of jail, and burn your opponent's hotels. Imagine a baseball game where the batter keeps the bat with him as he rounds the bases, just to break up that annoying double play at second base. Or how about a game of Scrabble where you can make up any word you like?

Most games work better with a few guiding principles in place. You would have to search far and wide to find a sport, a game, or even a simple contest with no rules whatsoever.

**But there is one.**

"What's this?" a husband demands, tossing a receipt onto the kitchen table.

"What's what?" his wife says without looking up.

"Two hundred and fifty dollars! For what?"

"For something I needed," she says indifferently.

"Why would you spend that kind of money without asking me first?"

"How was golf today?" she asks. "What did that set us back—forty, fifty dollars? You never seem to mention the cost of your hobbies, now, do you?"

"I'm talking about *unnecessary* expenses!" he says as his voice begins to rise.

"Why is it that only my expenses are unnecessary?" she shouts back.

"You're wasting our money!" he yells, charging from the room.

"What do you know about money?" she calls after him.

Conflict, which someone has said is the art of disagreeing while still holding hands, is a game without rules. It may sound strange to

speak of conflict as a “game,” but in a sense it is. Every marital disagreement has two players, a starting point, and a finish line. There is a playing field and a time limit, and there are penalties, fouls, and grounds for disqualification along the way. There are winners and losers too—though in this game, unlike most, both players can win or both can lose.

Right now you may be thinking, *If conflict is a game, then I'd rather not play*. Sorry. Conflict is a part of the true game of Life, and refusing to play is simply not an option. Differences in personality and temperament, multiple time demands, limited resources, and the sheer insanity of modern life all conspire to create occasional (or more than occasional) disagreements between partners. In marriage, conflict simply can't be avoided; the goal, then, is to learn to play the game as pleasantly and productively as possible.

We know a wise grandmother who cautions her grandkids, “Fight nicely.” What a concept! For many of us, the very idea of *fighting nicely* is a contradiction in terms. You can fight, or you can be nice; take your pick. But doing both at once is something many couples have never experienced. Believe it or not, it is possible to “fight nicely.” That's where clear rules and a good referee come in—and that's what conflict often lacks.

Like the early sport of boxing, conflict between lovers often has a single guiding principle: *Beat the other guy*. In the early days of boxing, the question of *how* to beat the other guy was left entirely to the individual combatants, and liberal interpretations of that rule left many men bloody, broken, or blind. Some, like the gladiators of old, even gave their lives in the arena.

That's why, in the late 1800s, the Marquis de Queensberry thought it was high time someone sat down and penned some rules for the sport of boxing. No more kicking and gouging, he said, and no more hitting below the belt. No head butting is allowed, no rabbit punching, and under no circumstances are you ever allowed to bite off your opponent's ear.

But just because a rule exists, that doesn't mean anyone has to obey

it. That's why the Marquis de Queensberry's regulations provided for a referee, a man whose job it was to make sure the rules were followed. To this day, whenever a boxing match is about to begin, a man in a striped shirt steps between the opponents and reviews the basic rules. To break the rules, he reminds them, is to forfeit the contest. The referee's goal is not to prevent the boxers from fighting; on the contrary, he is there to allow them to fight. The referee's goal is not to prevent the conflict from happening, but to make sure the boxers *fight fair*. By doing so, he greatly increases the chances that the boxers will live to fight another day.

But in marital conflict, there are no rules. Maybe that's why there's so much gouging, biting, and hitting below the belt—and maybe that's why so many love relationships perish in the act of disagreeing.

Wouldn't it be great if, when the sparks begin to fly between a husband and wife, a bell would ring, a closet door would fly open, and a man in a striped shirt would step out? Our own personal marital referee!

"You're wasting our money!" the husband yells, charging from the room.

*"Foul!" the referee calls out. "Get back in the ring or you're disqualified!"*

"What do you know about money?" his wife calls after him.

*"That's hitting below the belt!" the referee warns. "One more time and you're out of the game!"*

Since we have no referees to supervise our personal conflicts, we have to serve as our *own* referees. But what are the rules we should enforce? What are the errors and pitfalls we should watch for, and what are the behaviors we should encourage? This book is intended to be your own personal *Marquis de Queensberry's Rules for Conflict* in relationships: not a list of rules that *we* think you should apply, but a chance for you and your spouse to agree together on your *own* guidelines for successful conflict. All along the way we'll give you tips, insights, and suggestions that have worked for others, but it's your job to decide what you think will work best for you. At the end of the book is a section entitled "Our Rules." As you finish each chapter, turn back

to the “Our Rules” section and record any ideas you agree to apply in your own relationship.

You’ll find an entire chapter devoted to “Penalties and Fouls” (chapter 14), behaviors that are unproductive, discouraging, or even downright dangerous to the health of your relationship. We’ll give you a chance to identify your *own* fouls—specific words, behaviors, and attitudes that you know from experience to be hurtful or unproductive. In the “Our Rules” section, you’ll find a place for you to record your “Personal Fouls,” so that you can agree together to avoid them in the future.

By the end of this book, you will have your own personal set of rules for conflict. We encourage you to copy off those pages. Keep your list of guidelines handy to remind you of the things you’ve agreed together to do—and *not* do—in your next disagreement.

A word of caution: Rules allow a game to be played fairly and efficiently, but no game consists of rules alone. As we’ll emphasize over and over in this book, *success in conflict requires more than a set of rules*. It depends even more on the attitudes you bring to the game: humility, generosity, gentleness, and a genuine desire to work things out. If you are intent on being stubborn or on punishing your mate, no set of rules will prevent you from doing so. The rules in this book can improve your *technique* in conflict, but as chapter 5 will remind you, the attitude *behind* the technique is crucial.

*Everyone disagrees; that’s inevitable. The question is, How can we disagree with those we love but increase the odds that we will live and love to fight another day? How can we learn to “fight fair”?*

