

Right-Fighting

Are you a “Right-Fighter”?

- Do you find yourself struggling to “win” arguments?
- Do people ask you why you always have to be right?
- Does conflict you engage in typically end with you having the last word, but no one feels good about the argument?
- Do arguments you engage in usually escalate to shouting and anger?
- If you have said “yes” to any of these questions, you are likely a right-fighter.

What is a “Right-Fighter”?

- A right-fighter is someone who struggles to win arguments, even if they doubt their own view.
- A right-fighter is someone who gets overly emotional or angry when people do not agree with them and their opinions or beliefs.
- A right-fighter is someone who insists on having the last word in an argument, or refuses to back down no matter what.

An Example of Right Fighting Between A Parent and A Child:

- A while back I was in a restaurant, and I overheard a father having a loud and interesting conversation with his son. The man kept emphasizing how the child was wrong. The conversation went something like this:

Son: "Yes I did it, but not after you told me not to do it."

Father: "You did it on purpose."

Son: "Yes I did, but not after you told me to stop."

Father: "You did it (in a louder voice)!"

Son: "Yes, but I stopped after you told me."

Father: "You had a good time doing it, didn't you?"

Son: "No, I stopped."

Father: "But, before you stopped, you enjoyed it."

Son: "Yes. You are so wrong. I stopped when you told me to."

Father: "You were wrong, and that is the end of it. I don't want to hear another word about it."

- What is wrong with this? The father was so concerned about being right that he failed to teach his son the appropriate lesson. The lesson got lost in the man's right-fighting. The Dad would have been much more effective if he had simply acknowledged that his son did stop when asked to do so. Such would have positively let his son know that he had been heard, and then he could have reinforced that he did not expect to see his son engaging in such behavior again. Instead, the son probably left that conversation feeling picked on and weak, rather than encouraged and powerful to prevent the behavior from happening again. This kind of parenting leaves a relational mark on a child.

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What Lies Behind The Right-Fighter's Behavior?

- Right-fighters have poor self-concepts, little confidence, and are often self-loathing. Right-fighting is a direct reflection of low self-esteem.
- The very nature of right-fighting is to prove one's value and worth through being "right."
- People who are right-fighters (or those who are driven by the need to be right) have their value or worth literally attached to the outcome of being right.
- On a very deep level, a right-fighter believes that if he or she is not agreed with, then he or she is not valuable, lovable, and/or worthy.
- Right-fighters desperately believe (sub-consciously) that others must agree with them, otherwise they cannot feel good about themselves.
- Right-fighters are typically anxious, perfectionistic overachievers who experience little joy, laughter or genuine satisfaction. (This is unfortunate because these same people have vast resources of untapped potential. Right-fighters are usually quite capable, amazing and intelligent individuals, they just need to let go of their right-fighting habits.)
- Frequently, right-fighters are strong, forceful personalities (good virtues, in and of themselves, that become misdirected).
- Right-fighting is usually learned during formative years, and then mimicked. When parents manifest such low self-esteem behaviors, children will most likely mirror them too.

What Are the Consequences of Being a Right-Fighter?

- The right-fighter's low self-esteem, ironically, steals the potential for strong self-esteem in others.
- Right-fighting parents simply cannot grow confident children (the low self-esteem a right-fighting parent manifests steals the potential for strong self-esteem in their children).
- A right-fighting parent is particularly harmful to children because the child is made to feel like the "loser," and that his or her opinions are not valid or important.
- Right-fighting is an especially dangerous behavior for parents. A very common outcome of right-fighting is that it tends to breed explosiveness and anger within the home environment.
- Because right-fighters are punishing, those who co-exist with right-fighters experience consistent feelings of defeat, and learn to doubt their capabilities, lovability, and value as human beings.
- Being a right-fighter inevitably causes one to depend upon others for self-esteem. In reality, it constitutes a loss of control over the very area the right-fighter is seeking to reinforce.
- Right-fighters stir up dissension, leading others to resist, retaliate, and resent them.
- Right-fighting authority figures cultivate passive-aggressive cultures of disengaged, disloyal, and untrustworthy subordinates.
- Quite often right-fighters inadvertently create a lonely world for themselves that is filled with perceived (versus real) betrayals.
- Since right-fighters cannot possibly be right all the time, they are searching for self-esteem where it can never be found.
- Because right-fighting is not physical abuse, it becomes an acceptable form of violence or aggression that conditions those within its environment. However, since the right-fighting pattern usually ends up one-sided and includes a winner and a loser, the effects are similar to those of physical abuse. Learned submission on the part of children, and often the other parent/spouse, is inevitable. Right-fighting is, in fact, a severe form of emotional abuse.
- Right-fighting in a work environment creates disloyalty, frequent turnover, dishonesty, ineffectiveness, and an every man for himself attitude.

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How Does One Break the Habit Of Right-Fighting?

- Do Not Despair! If you have found that you may have some qualities of a right-fighter, don't start beating yourself up, begin working on it. You are a wonderful and lovable person with far more positive qualities than negative... this is certain!
- Honestly acknowledge being a right-fighter, as you can't change what you have not acknowledged. Acknowledging your habit of right-fighting, and then becoming aware of when you are engaging in this habit, is the first, most important step in leading a more successful and happy life.
- Accept that this way of relating to others simply doesn't work, as it will never give you what you so deeply long for (value, lovability, and worth). In fact, in reality, it is giving you one of the things you fear most—rejection.
- Know that this habit does NOT have to define you. You are capable of releasing this habit at any time.
- Search for emotionally safe people who unconditionally love that can help you separate being corrected/wrong from being worthless/unlovable.
- Take charge of your own self-esteem. Talk to and encourage yourself instead of always allowing yourself (i.e. your alter-ego) to negatively talk to you.
- Cultivate the reality that being differed with, corrected, or proven wrong has no connection to your intrinsic value and worth as a human being.
- In the future, when deep down inside you know you're wrong—yet you suddenly feel the charged need to be right re-surfacing—ask yourself, “would I rather be right or happy?”
- Imagine what life might be like for you if you traded always being “right” for being unconditionally loved, cared for, and respected.
- Try to imagine what conflict would be like if the outcome was not so vital to your self-esteem.
- Begin to gently remind yourself of your unchanging value and worth during arguments and disagreements, whether or not you fully believe it. “Fake it till you make it!”
- Begin to allow others to hold one opinion, and you another, without having ill or hurt feelings.
- Try validating others' opinions as equally valuable. This doesn't mean you must agree, it means saying “yes, you and your view are as valuable as mine.”
- Seek outside help if you need it (a partner for change might be a wonderful gift to yourself and to your family).

A Helpful Example of Right Fighting Between A Husband and A Wife (from the Dr Phil show):

Eddie and Stacey find themselves in a heated debate, and both think they're right.

"My husband is very serious about pursuing a career in the Ultimate Fighting Championship," says Stacey, who feels deceived. "Our original agreement was not to have children, and to grow old, and to travel and to spend our lives just being together. I missed the memo saying, 'Oh yeah, by the way, I have this dream to be an ultimate fighter.' I have said either pursue a career in this or choose me. I know I'm right about this. I'm afraid of a spinal injury, a brain injury, Eddie ending up in a coma, and I'll be robbed of this man whom I love so much."

Eddie even took Stacey to a fight, so she would understand. It didn't work. "Within 15 seconds, one of the fighters was kicked in the head!" she says. "It's extremely violent. I've seen people get choked unconscious, fist-on-face contact. Eddie and I fight about this all the time. It's gotten to the point where I couldn't even have a conversation. I would walk out of the room. I was just very, very angry. I know I'm right about this because who would want to risk such a wonderful life for a career in violence? All it takes is one punch and a life can be ruined."

"I'm fascinated by ultimate fighting," says Eddie. "Ultimate fighting is another form of hand-to-hand competition, much like wrestling," he explains. "I feel I'm right about this, because it's a drive, it's something that's in my blood, and I just can't let go of it. Stacey is being unreasonable in laying down an ultimatum like that, because she's not even letting me have the chance to compete in one match. I don't think I should have to choose between my wife or

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my dream of becoming an ultimate fighter. If someone offered me a fight tomorrow, I don't know if I could turn it down. I'm right about ultimate fighting because I think I have a legitimate shot."

At this point, Dr. Phil wants to know how Eddie and Stacey got to the point of being unable to compromise.

"I love my husband. He's the most wonderful person who's ever come into my life," says Stacey. "It just scares me. Even if the worst didn't happen, he would still be taking punches and I can't watch someone I love get hurt."

"I can't let that stop me though," says Eddie, "from at least wanting to see if there's some substance to it, Dr. Phil."

Dr. Phil asks Stacey, "Do you think you're being rational about this with him?"

Stacey admits she's probably not being rational when she threatens to leave Eddie over this. However, she still feels like it goes against the plan they made of growing old together.

"Relationships are negotiations," says Dr. Phil. "And when you throw out ultimatums, negotiations stop. When negotiations stop, relationships break down, people get hurt, they make irrational decisions, and you wind up with both of you not having what you want."

To settle their debate about who's right, Dr. Phil tells them, *"You're both wrong. I have a rule. You do not put your marriage on the line over day-to-day issues. What you have done, in the very beginning of your marriage here, is put your marriage on the line when you have a disagreement. Don't do it. Reopen the dialogue and negotiate."*

Dr. Phil has Eddie and Stacey take turns switching roles and arguing their spouse's side for one minute.

Eddie goes first. "Stacey, I shouldn't become an ultimate fighter because I could get seriously hurt. I could suffer maybe a long-term injury. I could get hit with that lucky punch, you know, that fluke of a punch that could do something to me. And I want to be as useful of a partner as I could in the future and not risk that," he says.

Then, Stacey argues Eddie's side. "I'm going to be such a better partner if I'm allowed to pursue this dream. Think of the life we could have if I can be successful at this. And if I'm always wondering what could've happened, if you don't let me pursue it and just try one local match, then I'm always going to wonder if this was something I could be really great at. And if I'm sitting around, filled with regret and filled with wondering, I don't think I'm going to be a very good husband to you," she says.

Dr. Phil thinks Stacey had a much more powerful argument when pretending she was in Eddie's shoes. What that tells him is that Eddie hasn't really heard Stacey's point of view.

But Dr. Phil also recommends that Stacey do her homework about the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC.) He introduces Dana White, the president of the UFC and the host of Spike TV's "The Ultimate Fighter." "There are a lot of misconceptions about the Ultimate Fighting Championship, true?" Dr. Phil asks Dana.

"There are. There's never been a death or serious injury in the 12-year history of the UFC," says Dana. "But on the other hand, she makes a good point. The UFC is the gold standard for the sport. We have the proper medical testing, the doctors are there on site, we're sanctioned by all the major athletic commissions in this country. The sport is absolutely safe. Are there risks? Absolutely, it's a contact sport. But I would make sure that I fought in a sanctioned event that was overseen by an athletic commission in whatever state he chooses to fight in."

Dr. Phil recommends that Stacey and Eddie *appreciate each other for who they are and learn to negotiate. "These differences are good. The mistake you've made is you've thrown down the ultimatums. Re-open the dialogue and talk about this. See if you can find some middle ground."*