**After the fight worksheet**

1. Apply this worksheet ONLY to your own contributions to the fight: e.g., “I can see how my saying ‘you always come home late when you have a meeting in which the beautiful blonde Tracy is participating,’ sounded like an accusation to you,” NOT “you accused me of cheating on you with Tracy, that’s how the fight started.” or “I can see how I got defensive and counterattacked by saying “oh yeah? What about how late you stayed at your brother’s house that night when your old boyfriend was over?”, NOT “You didn’t listen to me, instead you just got totally defensive, that’s how the fight started.”

2. Remember the fundamental principle: if your partner is sounding accusatory, that’s because she’s got something on her chest that’s she’s having trouble acknowledging and articulating; if the accusations and attacks are intensifying, that’s because she’s feeling unheard and trying to get through; and if your partner is sounding defensive, that’s because she’s feeling attacked.

A. What were my contributions to this fight?

**Did I use one of the “attack” or “listen to me” strategies?**

* Accusations and criticisms (“you statements”) explicit or implicit.
* Exaggerations: making ‘always’ or ‘never’ claims, overstating the problem.
* Dredging up old complaints or dumping out unrelated complaints.
* Interrupting, misinterpreting your partner’s words.
* Criticizing what your partner thinks, feels, or wants, or criticizing his or her character by calling him or her names.
* Interpreting your partner’s motives, beliefs, emotions, life-history (“psychoanalyzing him or her”)
* New and inventive strategy:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Given what I know about his or her sensitivities, what is my partner likely to have heard me say?**

**What was it I was trying to get my partner to hear that he/she didn’t seem to be hearing?**

* What’s a good “I statement” that says clearly what I wanted him/her to hear?
* Is there something uncomfortable about this “I statement” that might have led me to phrase it as a “you statement” instead?
  + Do I feel like it’s *dependent,* *needy*, *childish, demanding,* *nasty*, *selfish*, *stupid* (fill in your own negative judgment here: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_).
  + Do I fear that my partner won’t like it, will become defensive, will attack or leave me for it? Or do I fear that telling my partner my feelings leaves me too vulnerable, open to being taken advantage of.

**Did I use one of the defensive “I’m not listening to you” strategies?**

* Denying
* Explaining or making excuses
* Counterattacking
* Self-accusing
* Fixing
* Withdrawing

**What was it I heard my partner accusing me of?**

**What happened to me when I thought my partner was accusing me of this? What do I think is so terrible about the image of me conveyed in this accusation? Do I know something about my own sensitivities that makes sense of what was so terrible about the accusation that I couldn’t listen to it?**

**What might my partner have been needing to communicate?**

B. How do I approach my partner as we attempt to repair?

All the work accomplished in part A is to be put to use when you approach your partner in a collaborating (rather than fighting) state of mind, to make sense of what the fight was about and why it happened, and to see if you can tackle the real cause of the fight in a less painful way.

**Helping my partner get over the fight:**

* Are there things I said in anger that I don’t really mean? Are there things I exaggerated in anger that I can now tone down? Are there old complaints that I brought up to make a point but that I actually don’t need to discuss anymore?
* Are there things my partner needs acknowledged that I couldn’t acknowledge during the fight? Can I acknowledge them now (especially if they still feel like a criticism)? Do I understand better why it was so hard for me to acknowledge them to begin with?

**Things I need to get over the fight:**

* Are there things my partner said in anger that, even though I know it’s likely he/she doesn’t mean, I still need him/her to reassure me about?
* Are there fears that got triggered for me by the fight, and that need to be soothed before I can come out of fighting mode (e.g., fear my partner will leave me, that he or she has no respect for me, fear that he/she is a monster/not good enough for me)?
* Are there things I need my partner to acknowledge that I didn’t feel got acknowledged during the fight? The point of this exercise is to find out why they didn’t get acknowledged (your partner heard a criticism or an attack), why they led to a fight (why is your partner feeling attacked by this and what is at stake for him or her?) and how to formulate them in a way that your partner can hear and acknowledge.