

THE INTERNATIONAL  
BESTSELLER

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# THE RULES OF LOVE

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RULES  
OF  
LOVE

# Let not the sun go down upon your wrath

My mother always used to say this when I was a child, and for some reason I assumed it meant that you shouldn't go to bed angry just in case one of you died in the night. Very over-dramatic of me really, although I've known cases where it has happened. And believe me, if your partner should ever leave this world abruptly during the hours of darkness, the next few years of your life will be hugely affected by the mood you went to bed in. Likewise, every time you see them off at the door, it might be worth considering how you'd feel if they never came back. Sorry, that's very morbid. I don't mean you should fantasize miserably about it on a daily basis, I just mean you should instinctively always part with them as if this were the last time.

But this is also a much more mundane, everyday Rule that doesn't require you to dwell blackly on such depressing things. Pretty much all of us are either sulkers or exploders. So which are you? And if you explode, do you get it all out of your system or do you let it bubble away for hours or even days? We all have different ways of dealing with irritation, frustration and anger, and the way your partner copes with them will influence you too.

It's not healthy to argue constantly in a relationship, but it isn't necessarily a bad thing to have the occasional row – within the boundaries of grown-up behaviour. Rules Players never threaten or become abusive, or fling out accusations just to hurt, or allow themselves to come out with things they'll regret later. But within those limits, of course you'll argue from time to time.

But this isn't an argument with a colleague, or a sibling, or someone at a call centre, or a motorist who's just cut you up. This is an argument with the person you love most in all the world, so it's a horrid thing to happen and you need to get it

over with as quickly as possible. And the best way you can do that is to have an absolute rule that once it's over, it's over. Don't go dredging it up again, or continue to sulk or bubble away.

You should be able to start each day afresh, and you can't do that unless you put your argument to bed along with yourselves. Of course, big issues may need more discussion later, but that doesn't mean it has to be antagonistic, or that the bad feelings have to persist along with the debate.

You need to be clear that you are not the kind of people who go and sleep in the spare room (if you have one) because you're sulking, or who grumpily turn your backs on each other in bed. That sort of behaviour is for mediocre relationships, or worse. It's not for Rules relationships. The two of you are big enough to patch up any differences at the end of each day, and to recognize that you love each other too much to fall out over anything. And if your partner hasn't yet mastered the ability to swallow their pride and do it, then it's down to you. So how do you take that step and make sure that things are resolved before bedtime? That's easy. But you'll need to read the next Rule to find the answer.

**HAVE AN ABSOLUTE RULE  
THAT ONCE IT'S OVER,  
IT'S OVER**

# Be the first to say sorry

Grown-ups don't have rows. Sure, they argue, they disagree, they debate. They express their feelings and say when they're hurt or angry or upset. But they don't have the kinds of rows that require an apology to get over them.

Oh, alright then, we do. But that doesn't make it right. From time to time we forget to do the 'When you say . . . I feel . . .' thing we all know we should, and we behave childish instead. Don't worry, we all do it. I expect they started it anyway.

The big question is, having fallen out with the person we love, which isn't what we wanted to do of course, what are we going to do about it? And the answer – as you may have guessed from the title of this Rule – is to say sorry. And to say it even before they do.

How do you feel about saying sorry? Can't see why you should? Or do you feel you've lost face, been humiliated, had to swallow your pride? Well, don't. You're a Rules Player and you're big and strong and confident and self-assured enough to do it. I'm not asking you to say sorry publicly in front of 500 people after all. This is just a private apology to your very nearest and dearest. You can manage that.

And what are you apologizing for? Isn't it hypocritical to say sorry when you truly feel you were in the right? No, it isn't because that's not what you're saying sorry for. You're saying sorry for allowing a perfectly valid discussion about a difference of views to degenerate to this point. It takes two to argue and you're apologizing for being so childish as to let it happen, and for all the mistakes you must have made to reach this point.

Someone has to be first to acknowledge that childishness has gone on, and as you're a Rules Player it will have to be you. If your partner is a Rules Player too, you'll have to get a move on

if you're going to beat them to it. You have to prove that at least one of you can be magnanimous, generous, open, conciliatory and grown up. And with luck they'll respond by showing you that they can be all those things too. They just needed you to remind them.

Whatever it was you fell out over – which may or may not still need resolving once everyone has calmed down – making up and being friends again has got to be better than sulking or stropping was. You both got yourselves into this pickle and it will take both of you to get yourselves out.

Remember, you're apologizing for allowing things to get overheated and out of hand. You're not apologizing for your original opinion or action. Unless, of course, you were actually out of order there as well. In which case you will indeed apologize for that too.

**YOU'RE APOLOGIZING  
FOR BEING SO CHILDISH  
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FOR ALL THE MISTAKES  
YOU MUST HAVE MADE TO  
REACH THIS POINT**

# Let them have the last word

So, you're having a discussion, a chat, a debate, or a downright argument. You've both finished and everything that needs to be said has been said (and probably a bit more besides). So, why not just stop talking? In theory it's possible for you both to stop at the same time, but somehow it's more difficult to achieve in practice. So how about you stop first?

Most of us find this very hard to do. I guess we think that if we let the other person have the last word without responding to them, we're implying that they're right and we know we're beaten.

Hold on. That's only true if we're in some sort of competition, where we're trying to score points off each other and win some kind of (petty) victory. That's not very grown up, is it? And more to the point, if you look back at why you two got together in the first place, I think you'll find that the idea was to form a partnership – a team. In which case, aren't you both supposed to be on the same side?

And if you're both on the same side, do you think that putting your team in a position where its members are scoring points off each other means that you have – as a team – won or lost?

Of course you'll have disagreements, but the idea is to find a solution together. OK, I know that just sometimes you maybe both need to blow off some steam before you get to that point. But last words aren't about blowing off steam. They come after that stage. They're purely about point scoring. At best they add to the prevailing resentment, and at worst they cause the whole argument to flare up again.

And then you're stuck on that treadmill until *someone* decides to step off it without having the last word. Someone mature, thoughtful, intelligent. Someone who knows how to see the bigger picture. Someone who can rise above the pettiness and make a stand for common sense and conciliation. Yep, that's right – you.

The sooner the bickering stops, the sooner you can start working together to find a solution you're both happy with. So letting them have the last word doesn't mean that you've lost. It means you're hastening the time when you jointly find a winning solution. Try it – and bask in the feeling of being on the moral high ground.\*

**YOU'RE STUCK ON THAT  
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\* Without smugness, that is. Otherwise you're not really on the moral high ground at all, are you?