A SHORT GUIDE TO FIGHTING FAIR

The Reset *Button*

Two shifts that keep a hard conversation from turning into a fight, and one phrase you can use tonight.

Jim Urban, LMHC Founder, Uplift Counseling Center 6-minute read



UNDERSTANDING THE PATTERN

Why the Fight Keeps Coming Back

A husband once sat across from me, arms crossed, jaw tight. His wife had tears in her eyes. “I just want to share my heart and feel like he’s with me,” she said. “Every conversation turns into a fight.”

He wasn’t trying to hurt her. He was a problem solver by nature. The moment she opened up, he switched into fix it mode. What’s the issue. What’s the solution. She didn’t feel loved. She felt like a bug report.

> What happens between you when a hard topic comes up shapes the marriage far more than the topic itself.

Here’s something worth knowing about yourself: your body reacts before your mind catches up. Heart rate climbs. Chest tightens. Your voice picks up an edge you didn’t plan. Your nervous system is bracing for a threat, even when the threat is only a hard conversation.



WHAT’S INSIDE

1. The pause, and how to call it
2. A sentence that names the problem without attacking your spouse
3. A practice for tonight
4. What a repair sounds like

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.” – James 1:19

SHIFT ONE

The Pause

When you feel that heat rising, you have a choice. You can let it carry you somewhere you'll regret. Or you can use the pause.

SAY THIS OUT LOUD

"I'm maxed."

1 **Name it.**
Tell your spouse you need a break, not that you're ending the conversation.

2 **Take 20 to 30 minutes.**
Long enough to calm your body. Short enough that it doesn't feel like abandonment.

3 **Set a return time.**
"Let's come back at 8:15." That one detail changes everything.

A break works like a reset button, giving both of you room to come back calmer and ready to keep going.

SHIFT TWO

Fight the Problem, Not Each Other

Every argument has two layers. There's the actual issue. Then there's the story you tell about it. "You don't care." "You're so selfish." Fair fighting stays on the first layer.

LAYER ONE · THE ISSUE

What actually happened, and how it landed on you.

LAYER TWO · THE STORY

What you decide it means about your spouse. This is where fights live.

Instead of attacking who your spouse is, name what's happening and how it affects you.

TRY THIS STRUCTURE

"When you shut down mid-conversation, I feel alone and unimportant."

When you… → I feel…

It'll feel stiff at first. That's normal. Stick with it anyway. The structure becomes natural with practice, and it keeps you both on the same team even when you disagree.



PRACTICE

Try This Tonight

- [ ] Pick one small, recurring friction point. Not your biggest issue, just a regular one.
- [ ] Practice one “When you… I feel…” statement with your spouse.
- [ ] If things start to heat up, use your pause phrase. Come back and finish the conversation.

ASK EACH OTHER

What’s one thing I do that makes it hard to feel close to you?

What’s one small step we could take this week to move toward each other?



COMING BACK TOGETHER

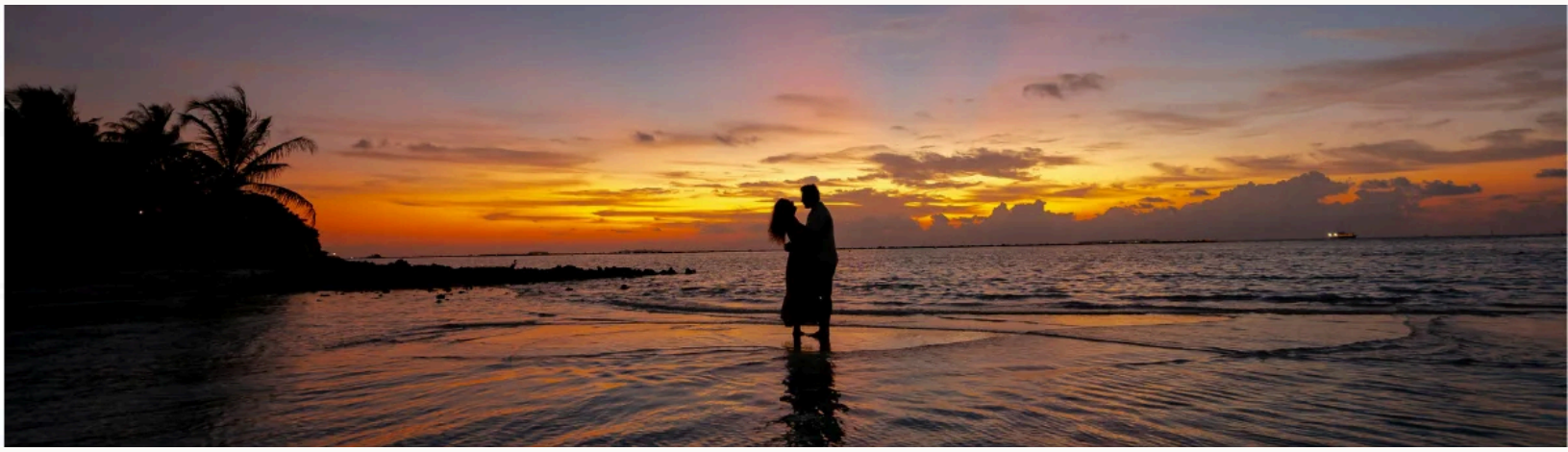
A Small Repair Goes a Long Way

The couples who make it aren't the ones who never mess up. They're the ones who repair quickly.

> "Earlier I came at you like you were the problem. I'm sorry. I'm scared about our budget, and it comes out as criticism."

> "And I shut down because I feel like I can't do anything right. I'm sorry for going cold on you."

That's a repair. The issue is still there, but the spirit behind it has softened.



KEEP THIS WHERE YOU'LL SEE IT

The Reset Button, on One Page

WHEN YOU FEEL THE HEAT RISE

"I'm maxed."

- Name it as a break, not an ending
- Take 20 to 30 minutes
- Set a return time out loud

WHEN YOU COME BACK

"When you... I feel..."

- Name the behavior, not the character
- Stay on the issue, not the story
- Repair early: "I'm sorry. Here's what I was scared of."

Tonight's questions: *What's one thing I do that makes it hard to feel close to you? What's one small step we could take this week to move toward each other?*

Ready for support putting these tools into practice?

Uplift Counseling Center is here for you, whenever you're ready.

Book a couples session

upliftcounselingtherapy.com/marriagecounseling-2 · Jim Urban, LMHC · Founder, Uplift Counseling Center