

The A.R.T of Making a Claim:

B. Hibbs, Ph.D., Psychologist, teaches couples a new language of fairness in her book, *Try to See It My Way, Being Fair in Love and Marriage*. She helps couples use the positive outcomes that come from acknowledgment, reciprocity and trust to increase their success in making a claim to increase fairness that moves them closer to their preferred approach to balancing work and family.

A: Acknowledgment

Acknowledgement improves relationships by: verbally communicating credit, affirming good intentions, and validating a partner's perspective (their reality).

Withholding acknowledgment results in an adversarial, one-sided model for relating.

There's a lost opportunity for offering care, and paradoxically, you are less likely to feel heard or understood yourself.

R: Reciprocity

When you give, it's reasonable to expect that your partner will return your care, in some way, at some time. It's not selfish. In fact, it's healthy for you to want something in return.

Signs of giving too much: emotional depletion, depression, resentment, simmering anger, disappointment, feeling like you "didn't get a turn"

Justifications for taking too much: If someone offers, why not accept? If my partner's angry, it's their own problem. I never asked my partner to do too much. It's your job to look after yourself. These rationalizations create emotional distance.

T: Trust

Trust grows when you have your needs considered (even when unmet) and shrinks when you get less than you deserve. As trust fluctuates, so does closeness. You have to have trust to feel close to your partner. In a healthy relationship, you're able to give freely and trust that you'll receive care and consideration in return.

Claims: an earned request

Fairness is created in the seesaw balance of giving and receiving. Acts of care and consideration "earn" you the right to make a claim for fairness in a clear statement of your needs. Some claims can be simple to meet. Some claims may require a significant amount of change.

Fair claims or unfair needs? The line between what's fair and what's unfair is blurred. A request for consideration may seem reasonable to one person but unreasonable and unfair to the other.

Feelings provide important clues, but feelings are also made up of unconscious family rules and assumptions about how to assess "what's fair."

Making a claim to express your needs can feel risky and you may feel vulnerable when making a claim. **Take the fairness quiz. Are there ways you are shortchanging yourself and your relationship when resolving issues of fairness?**