

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

1. Criticism:

Attacking the personality or character of your partner, usually with the intent of making someone right and someone wrong instead of focusing on a specific behavior. Most likely to invite defensiveness as they feel under attack. No one feels heard.

Generalizations: “You always...”, “You never...”, “You’re the type of person who...”, “Why are you so...”

Antidotes: Talk about feelings using “I” statements that expose a positive need.

Learn to make specific complaints and requests, “When X happened, I felt Y, I want Z.” Don’t make them feel something is wrong with them.

2. Contempt:

Attacking your partner’s sense of self with the intention to insult or psychologically abuse him or her. Destroys fondness and admiration. Contempt is a statement of superiority that comes out as:

- Insults and Name Calling
- Hostile humor, sarcasm, mockery
- Body language and Tone of Voice: Sneering, rolling eyes, curling your upper lip

Antidotes: Treat each other with respect. Foster a culture of appreciation in a relationship.

Validate your partner (Let them know what makes sense to you about what they are saying; let them know you understand what they are feeling, see through their eyes!) Conscious communication: Speak unarguable truth and listen generously.

THIS IS THE GREATEST PREDICTOR OF RELATIONSHIP FAILURE

3. Defensiveness:

Seeing yourself as the victim, warding off a perceived attack. Self-protection through righteous indignation. Escalates negative communication.

- Making excuses (e.g., external circumstances beyond your control forced you to act in a certain way) “It’s not my fault...”, “I didn’t...”
- Cross-Complaining: Meeting your partner’s complaint or criticism with a complaint of your own, ignoring what your partner said
- Disagreeing and then cross-complaining: “That’s not true, you’re the one who...”, “I did this because you did that...”
- Yes-Butting: Start off by agreeing, but end up disagreeing
- Repeating yourself without listening to what your partner is saying

Antidotes: Accept responsibility, even if only for a small part of the problem. Claim

Responsibility: “What can **I** learn from this?”, “What can **I** do about it?”

Practice “undefending” – Allow your partner’s utterances to be exactly that, just thoughts and puffs of air and let go of the stories you are blowing up.

4. Stonewalling:

Withdrawing from the relationship as a way to avoid conflict. Partners may think they are trying to be neutral, but stonewalling conveys disapproval, icy distance, separation, disconnection, and/or smugness:

- Stony silence/ Silent Treatment
- Monosyllabic mutterings
- Changing the subject
- Removing yourself physically

Antidotes: Learn when you/your partner is/are feeling overwhelmed and agree to take a break! If the problem still needs discussion, pick it back up when you are both more calm.