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.