



# FOUR HORSEMEN & THEIR ANTIDOTES



The Four Horsemen and their Antidotes were created by Dr. John Gottman with his research into relationships spanning over 40 years. What he found was that there were two types of couples.

**First**, he called the **Disasters** due to their poor communication.

**Second**, he called the **Masters**, which rarely used the four horsemen in their communication since they were able to effectively communicate with their partners and take responsibility for their part in the conflict.



## The Four Horsemen Are:

1. Criticism
2. Defensiveness
3. Contempt
4. Stonewalling



## The Antidotes Are:

1. Using a Gentle Start-Up
2. Taking Responsibility
3. Describing your Feelings and Needs
4. Self Soothing



# C R I T I C I S M

The way in which we define Criticism is "You" statements. The reason being is that "You" statements are frequently harsh and aggressive. One characteristic of Criticism is that it typically is verbally attacking the personality or character traits of your partner.

Typically, this will be done with an aggressive tone and body language.

## Examples include:

"You" always make me feel unsupported with making the decisions without me.

Why do "You" talk nasty to me, "You" make it seem like "You" said nothing wrong.

"You" are such a slob leaving the dishes dirty, why don't "You" just clean up after yourself?



# G E N T L E S T A R T U P

The Antidote for Criticism is to "Use a Gentle Start-Up." A Gentle Start-Up can be defined as an "I" statement, instead of a "You" statement. The difference between an "I" statement and a "You" statement is that when you express yourself, you are sharing your perspective, instead of discussing the other individual. The key is to use a soft tone of voice with assertive body language.

## Examples include:

"I" feel unsupported in making this decision and "I" think we need to discuss it.

"I" have been feeling hurt with the way you have been talking to me.

"I" feel like you take advantage of me cleaning when you leave dishes dirty.  
Could you please wash your dish when you are done?



# DEFENSIVENESS

Defensiveness will occur when we are feeling attacked or threatened. The problem with this can be that we resort to our instincts. We typically will counter-attack or even take a victim stance. Both of which, turn a conversation into a difficult situation. Counter attacking happens when you respond to criticism with a criticism of your partner.

## **Examples of Counter-attack include:**

Partner - "**You**" forgot to pack the blanket.

Counter-attack - "**You**" told me we had it before leaving.

## **Examples of becoming a victim include:**

Partner - "How did we forget the blanket?"

Your victim response in a whiny tone - "We both checked that it was there too."



# TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

The antidote to being defensive is Taking Responsibility for your part in the conflict.

Don't take the feedback from your partner personally. Lastly, show remorse and apologize for your actions. Just remember, there is no guarantee your partner will respond the same.

## **Examples of include:**

Partner - "How did we forget the blanket?"

You taking responsibility - "Oh you're right! I forgot to double-check after dinner, I'm sorry."

Partner - "We lost our table since you were so late."

You taking responsibility - "I am sorry that I forgot to call earlier, I had a meeting later than expected.."





# CONTEMPT

Contempt can be the strongest indicator that there are major issues lingering inside a relationship. Contempt is an amplified form of Criticism. Forms of contempt are characterized by actions like eye-rolling, slamming doors, yelling, or aggressive rhetoric towards your partner.

**Examples of include:**

"**You**" are just God's gift to Earth!"

"Oh, aren't "**You**" so smart, you just know everything."

"Why don't "**You**" ever treat me like that?"

Each of these responses is accompanied by some form of aggressive body language.



# DESCRIBING YOUR FEELINGS AND NEEDS

The Antidote to Contempt is Describing your Feelings and Needs. Just as Contempt is a stronger form of Criticism, Describing your Feelings and Needs is a stronger form of Gentle Start-up. Just like with Gentle Start-Up you will want to use a calm voice with non-aggressive body language.

**Examples of include:**

"It hurts me knowing that "**I**" made you feel this way, what do you need from me?"

"Life is not black and white, "**I**" hope you can keep an open mind during this conversation."





# STONEWALLING

Stonewalling can happen anytime we are feeling stressed out, anxious, or attacked. In some ways, this can be a response that falls into the defensive mechanisms. It is important to know if this happens as we stop communicating or we could potentially act in ways we would later regret. Being able to recognize when this physiological response is happening will be important to any conversation.

## **Examples of include:**

No longer being able to come up with rational responses.

Walking away and discussing with friends or family instead of your partner.

Emotionally withdrawing from the conversation.

Taking time to be alone without working on soothing yourself or realizing what you need from your partner.



# SELF-SOOTHING

The Antidote to Stonewalling is Self-Soothing. This would be an attempt or strategy to calm down during this strenuous situation. No matter the type of way you handle calming down and de-escalating a situation it is important to be open with your partner about what is happening.

## **Examples of include:**

Telling your partner you need a break to calm down. This can range from a minute to twenty minutes. There is no time minimum or maximum time as every situation is different.

A meditation routine, going for a walk, or even just taking time to collect your thoughts to express yourself effectively

