

The **four horsemen** are behaviors that escalate conflict and damage a relationship. Over time, these harmful behaviors may become a normal part of communication between partners.

**Antidotes** are skills that replace each of the four horsemen. These skills help resolve conflict and encourage positive feelings between partners.



## Four Horsemen



## Antidotes

<p><b>Criticism</b></p> <p>Dealing with problems through harsh, blaming, or hurtful expressions of judgment or disapproval.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus is on perceived personal flaws rather than changeable behaviors.</li> <li>• Often met with defensiveness.</li> </ul> <p><i>This kitchen is a mess. You're such a slob.</i></p>	<p><b>Gentle Startup</b></p> <p>Dealing with problems in a calm and gentle way. The focus is on the problem—not the person.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Save the discussion for an appropriate time.</li> <li>• Use warm body language and tone of voice.</li> <li>• Use "I" statements.</li> </ul> <p><i>I feel frustrated when dirty dishes are left in the sink. <u>Could you please</u> do the dishes tonight?</i></p>
<p><b>Defensiveness</b></p> <p>Deflecting responsibility for your own mistakes and behaviors or refusing to accept feedback.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making excuses for behavior.</li> <li>• Shifting blame to your partner.</li> </ul> <p><i>It isn't my fault I yelled. You were late, not me!</i></p>	<p><b>Take Responsibility</b></p> <p>Own up to your behavior without blaming others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid taking feedback personally.</li> <li>• Use feedback as an opportunity to improve.</li> <li>• Show remorse and apologize.</li> </ul> <p><i>I shouldn't have raised my voice. I'm sorry.</i></p>
<p><b>Contempt</b></p> <p>Showing anger, disgust, or hostility toward your partner.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using putdowns or insults.</li> <li>• Acting superior to your partner.</li> <li>• Using a mocking or sarcastic tone.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Share Fondness &amp; Admiration</b></p> <p>Foster a healthy relationship by regularly showing each other respect and appreciation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show affection.</li> <li>• Recognize your partner's strengths.</li> <li>• Give compliments.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stonewalling</b></p> <p>Emotionally withdrawing, shutting down, or going silent during important discussions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often a response to feeling overwhelmed.</li> <li>• Used to avoid difficult discussions or problems</li> <li>• Underlying problems go unresolved.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Use Self-Soothing</b></p> <p>Use relaxation techniques to calm down and stay present with your partner.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree to pause the conversation briefly.</li> <li>• Use deep breathing.</li> <li>• Use progressive muscle relaxation (PMR).</li> </ul>