

# THE FOUR HORSEMEN AND THEIR ANTIDOTES

The four horsemen are behaviours that escalate conflict and damage a relationship (Gottman Institute). Over time, these harmful behaviours may become a normal part of communication between partners.

They can be balanced out with skills that replace each of the four horsemen to resolve and encourage positive feelings between partners.

# THE FOUR HORSEMEN AND THEIR ANTIDOTES

This can also be made sense of from Esther Perel's concept of "kitchen sinking" wherein passive aggression or negative ways of dealing with conflict can lead to them piling up. It happens in a similar way to how dirty dishes pile on top of each other when not cleaned for a while.

# CRITICISM


## GENLE STARTUP

Dealing with problems through harsh, blaming, or hurtful expressions of judgement or disapproval.

Focus is on perceived personal flaws rather than modifiable behaviours.


Dealing with problems in a calm and gentle way moves the focus from the person onto the problem itself.

# DEFENSIVENESS RESPONSIBILITY




Deflecting responsibility for our own mistakes and behaviours, or refusing to accept feedback.

Instead, taking responsibility about our behaviour gives us the agency over our thoughts and feelings and takes away the negativity.




# CONTEMPT

## ADMIRATION




Showing anger, hostility or other negative feelings towards your partner with insults or mockery.

Instead, showing appreciation and respect to one another is a healthier and productive way to go about it.




# STONEWALLING

## SELF-SOOTHING



Emotionally withdrawing, shutting down, or going silent ends up putting up a barrier in the conversation.

Instead, relaxation techniques and mutual pauses help maintain the peace and return to the conversation when ready.



# WHY DO WE ENGAGE IN THESE BEHAVIOURS?

These behaviours come from a protective stance, after being under stress and in fight or flight mode, leads to these behaviours. We feel like we're under attack and are likely to defend ourselves in any way possible, even at the cost of a relationship that we hold dearly.