

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