

Understanding and Overcoming the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in Relationships

The Four Horsemen are behaviours that escalate conflict and damage in a relationship. Over time, these behaviours can become the common form of communication in a relationship and cause more emotional distance between partners.

The antidotes are skills that replace each of these four horsemen. These skills help to resolve conflicts and restore more positive emotions between partners.

Horseman	Description	Antidote
1. Criticism	Expressing discontent with a partner's character or personality.	Gentle Start-up Share your needs using "I" statements and express your feelings without attacking your partner's character. Begin conversations gently to foster a positive tone.
2. Contempt	Displaying superiority or disdain, often through sarcasm, eye-rolling, or insults.	Build Culture of Appreciation Cultivate a culture of mutual respect and appreciation. Regularly express gratitude and fondness towards your partner, fostering a positive emotional connection.
3. Defensiveness	Responding to criticism with a counterattack or making excuses.	Take Responsibility Accept responsibility for your part in the issue. Use "I" statements to express your feelings and needs without deflecting blame onto your partner.
4. Stonewalling	Withdrawing from conversations, shutting down, and avoiding conflict.	Physiological Self-Soothing Take breaks when necessary, but commit to returning to the conversation. Practice self-soothing techniques such as deep breathing or mindfulness to manage stress.

The Four Horsemen: A Deeper Look

1. Criticism:

- Recognize when criticism occurs and strive to replace it with a more constructive approach.
- Encourage each other to express needs and feelings without attacking character.
- Practice active listening to understand the underlying concerns.

2. Contempt:

- Cultivate a positive environment by expressing appreciation and affection regularly.
- Engage in activities that strengthen the emotional bond between partners.
- Seek professional help if contempt persists to address deeper issues.

3. Defensiveness

- Take a moment to reflect on your own contributions to conflicts.
- Use "I" statements to express your perspective and feelings.
- Foster a collaborative approach to problem-solving.

4. Stonewalling:

- Recognize signs of stonewalling, such as withdrawal or silence.
- Agree on a signal or safe word to indicate the need for a break.
- Practice self-soothing techniques and commit to returning to the conversation.

Building a Strong Relationship:

- **Regular Check-ins:** Schedule regular check-ins to discuss concerns and improvement.
- **Professional Help:** consider couples counselling if challenges persist.
- **Shared goals:** collaborate on shared goals to strengthen your relationship.

Remember, addressing the Four Horsemen involves commitment, open communication, and a willingness to make positive changes. By implementing these antidotes, you can foster a healthier and more resilient relationship.