

The Four Horsemen

TOXIC RELATIONSHIP BEHAVIORS

SUMMARY

There's a troubling trend. Marriages in the U.S. are ending earlier than ever before.

- Half of all divorces occur before the 8th wedding anniversary
- The highest rate of divorce is in year four
- 70% of these couples divorce without seeking professional help
- Comparable patterns exist in many other developed countries

Dr. John Gottman was able to identify 4 scientifically proven behaviors that are predictive of divorce if left to run rampant in the relationship. The behaviors are **criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling**.

Even happily married couples slip into one of these four behaviors from time to time, but they are actively engaged in getting rid of them and using their antidotes instead.

CRITICISM: A complaint that is globalized to be a character flaw in your partner. In the example below, the complaint is about dishes left on the counter but the criticism is that the partner is a "slob".

Example: "You're such a slob, you always leave your dishes sitting on the kitchen counter to rot and attract flies. This isn't a frat house!"

Antidote: Complain gently about the behavior. Don't attack or question their character.

CONTEMPT: Is a habit of mind in which you look down at your partner and believe yourself to be superior. This of the four behaviors is the most toxic to the relationship. An example of contempt below demonstrates a superior attitude.

Example: "You pick the kids from practice today, it's not like you're at work all day making money to put a roof over our heads."

Antidote: Create a positive habit of mind looking up to your partner.

DEFENSIVENESS: Any attempt to defend oneself from a perceived attack. Defensiveness is often a negative response to criticism. Defensiveness appears as righteous indignation, counter attacks or even whining. The example below demonstrates a counter attack.

Example: "If anyone is a slob, it's you! What about the gallon of milk you spilled in the car and didn't clean up the next day? Now the car smells like cheese."

Antidote: Take some part of responsibility for your partner's complaint.

STONEWALLING: Psychological withdraw from an interaction with the speaker by shutting down and closing off from dialogue while remaining physically present. It is an attempt to avoid escalation and/or to self-soothe. Stonewalling is most often used by men (80%).

Example: The stonewalling partner is physically present but has emotionally and cognitively disengaged from the conversation. Stonewallers give zero nonverbal communication cues that they are listening, often have their arms crossed and deny eye contact.

Antidote: Verbalize to your partner that you need to take a 20 minute break to reset.

ACTIVITIES

Which of the four horsemen are currently at play in your relationship?

- Criticism Contempt Defensiveness Stonewalling

Which of the four behaviors do YOU use most often? What do they look like when they come out?

And what about your PARTNER?

What one habit (antidote) can each of you adopt to begin removing these behaviors from your relationship?

The first step in removing the four horsemen from your relationship is to become aware. This week, I want you to focus on yourself and when one of the four horsemen are present. Simply notice that it is there and remind yourself of the antidote. In time, you will learn how to use the antidote regularly.