

The following information is adapted from the research of John Gottman, Ph.D. His research indicates that many couples have distress-maintaining habits rather than self-soothing habits. He identifies two kinds of marriages that are heading for destruction:

1. The hostile/engaged marriage: couples who argue often
2. The hostile/detached marriage: couples who are emotionally uninvolved

The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse

The Four Horseman are disastrous ways of interacting that sabotage attempts to communicate with a partner. The Four Horseman block a couple's ability to use healthier "repair mechanisms."

Criticism

- Invites defensiveness
- Involves attacking someone's personality or character rather than a specific behavior
- Usually with blame (betrayal) Example: "*You always do things like that*"
- Complaining (expressing anger/disagreement) is healthy compared to long-term suppression
- Involves a negative comment about something you wish were true

Antidote: Begin with "I"

Example: "*I wanted the laundry done so I could get to the mall*" vs. "*You should have finished by now. You know I want to get to the mall.*"

Contempt

- The intent to insult and psychologically abuse your partner
- Tend to forget your partner's positive qualities
- Immediate decay of admiration

Signs:

- insults and name calling
- hostile humor
- mockery (words or actions are made fun of "Oh, sure you care about me")
- body language

Antidote: Neutralize your contempt by not seeing arguments with your spouse as a way to retaliate or exhibit your superior moral stance.