

The Four Horseman – The Gottman Institute

1. Criticism

- Blaming a relationship problem on personality flaws in your partner.
 - **Solution:**
 - Gentle Start Up – Talk about your feelings using “I” statements and express a positive need.
 - Example: Instead of saying, “You’re so lazy!” Say, “I feel stressed out from doing most of the housework. Can you please take out the garbage tonight?”
 - Template: “I’m feeling _____ about _____. This is what I need _____.”
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2. Contempt:

- Criticism of your partner with descriptions of your own superiority and showing disgust toward your partner.
 - **Solution:**
 - Build a culture of appreciation. Remind yourself of your partner’s positive qualities and find gratitude for positive actions.
 - Example: “Instead of putting down your partner which may hurt their feelings, try telling them what you would appreciate them doing that would make you feel supported.”
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3. Defensiveness:

- Defending against your partner’s criticism or contempt by either denying any responsibility for the problem, acting like an innocent victim, or counter-attaching your partner by criticizing them while ignoring their complaints.
 - **Solution:**
 - Take responsibility. Accept your partner’s point of view and offer an apology for any wrongdoing.
 - Examples
 - “Honey, I really screwed up. I’m so sorry.”
 - “I’m feeling defensive right now. Can you say that in a different way?”
 - “Okay, fair enough.”
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4. Stonewalling:

- Involves shutting down completely and refusing to offer any verbal or non-verbal responses to your partner’s statements. Stonewalling may be accompanied by flooding (being psychologically in a flight-or-fight state).
- **Solution:** Self-Soothing
 - Monitor your heart rate.
 - Take a break from the conversation.
 - Deep breathing exercises.
 - Progress relaxation.