

John Gottman's FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE

1. Criticism:

Attacking your partner's personality or character, usually with the intent of making someone right and someone wrong:

Generalizations: "you always..." "you never..." "you're the type of person who ..." "why are you so ..."

2. Contempt:

Attacking your partner's sense of self with the intention to insult or psychologically abuse him/her:

- Insults and name-calling: "bitch, bastard, wimp, fat, stupid, ugly, slob, lazy..."
- Hostile humor, sarcasm or mockery
- Body language & tone of voice: sneering, rolling your eyes, curling your upper lip

3. Defensiveness:

Seeing self as the victim, warding off a perceived attack:

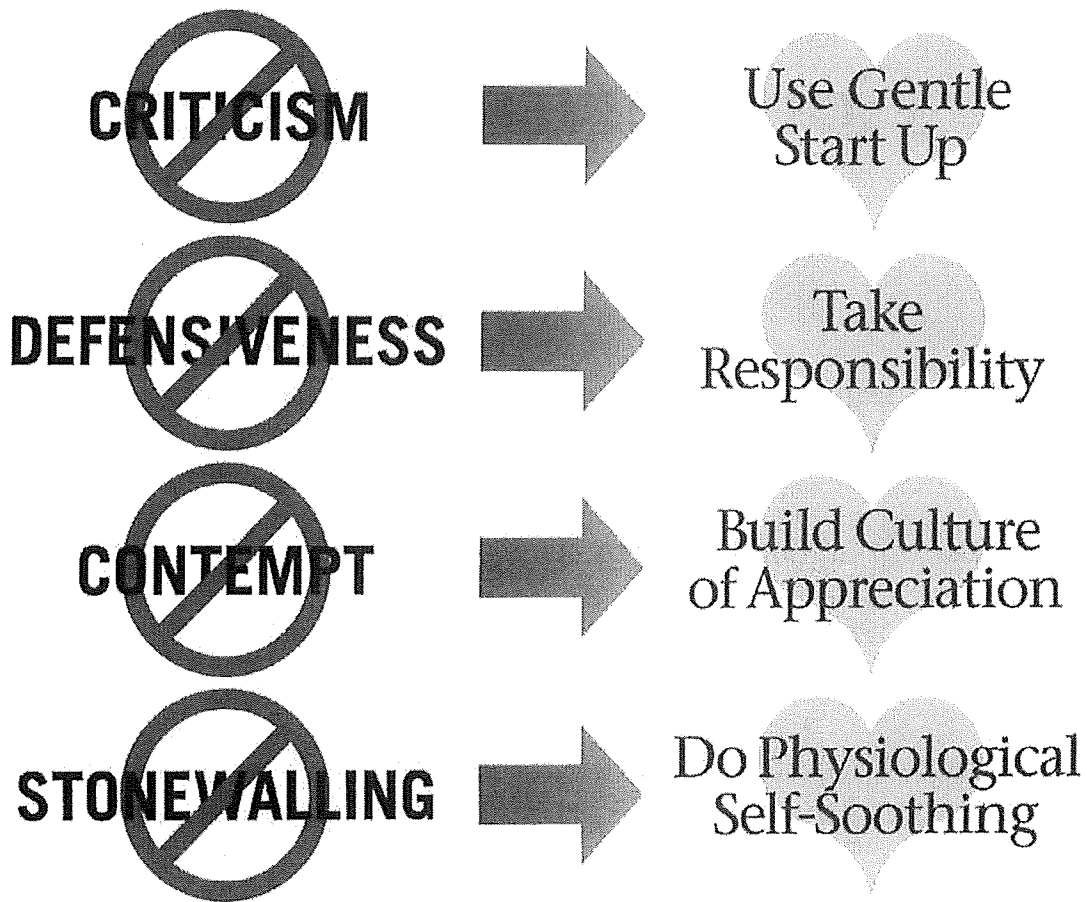
- Making excuses (e.g., external circumstances beyond your control forced you to act in a certain way) "It's not my fault...", "I didn't..."
- Cross-complaining: meeting your partner's complaint, or criticism with a complaint of your own, ignoring what your partner said
- Disagreeing and then cross-complaining "That's not true, you're the one who ..." "I did this because you did that..."
- Yes-butting: start off agreeing but end up disagreeing
- Repeating yourself without paying attention to what the other person is saying
- Whining "It's not fair."

4. Stonewalling:

Withdrawing from the relationship as a way to avoid conflict. Partners may think they are trying to be "neutral" but stonewalling conveys disapproval, icy distance, separation, disconnection, and/or smugness:

- Stony silence
- Monosyllabic mutterings
- Changing the subject
- Removing yourself physically
- Silent Treatment

Stop the Four Horsemen with their Antidotes



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V. MANAGE CONFLICT

Process a Fight or Misunderstanding

Remember that in any miscommunication or fight:

- There are two subjective realities, both are right.
- Instead of trying to persuade your partner of your reality, it's your job to find out your partner's subjective reality.

Use the **Aftermath of a Fight or Regrettable Incident** as your guide to process it and make it better next time.

Use the Six Skills for Managing Conflict:

1. **Soften Your Startup.** *Use the rules for softened startup:*

- Take the blame out of the complaining
- Start sentences with "I" instead of "You". "I feel upset. I feel anxious. I feel angry. I feel frustrated."
- Describe what is happening without evaluation or judgment. Use neutral statements.
- Talk clearly and positively about what you need (versus what you don't need)
- Be polite
- Give appreciations
- Don't store things up. You want to bring up complaints, but when you do, bring them up just a little bit at a time.

2. **Use No-Fault Arguing. Repair and De-escalate.**

- Don't waste time trying to lay blame.
- Drop past resentments.
- Practice forgiveness. The quality of mercy is not strained.

Use the **Repair Checklist** if there are any negative feelings that emerge.

3. **Practice Physiological Self-Soothing**

- When partners practice self-soothing, diffuse physiological arousal (DPA) is minimized.
- Conflict discussions are less escalated, gentler, and therefore safer.
- Physiological self-soothing helps the relationship become a port in the storm, and not the storm itself.

4. **Understand Your Partner's Way of Thinking – Accept What You Cannot Change**

- Each of you presents your subjective reality on the issue.
- Try to listen to your partner's viewpoints and see the logic of his or her perception.
- Don't try to solve the problem yet.
- Just make sure you're on the same page, with some emotional understanding and acceptance.

5. **Accept Influence.**

- You cannot be powerful in a relationship unless you are capable of being influenced.
- Yield to win.

6. **Compromise.**

- Identify the core areas you can not yield on.
- Identify areas of greater flexibility. Where, when, and how things will be done. What is your common ground? What are our guiding feelings, common values and goals?
- Arrive at a compromise solution. It is a temporary experiment.

Summary: Softened Startup Rules

- Start Sentence With “I” Instead of “You”
- Objectively Describe What is Happening, Don’t Evaluate or Judge
- Talk Clearly and Positively About What You Need (versus what you don’t need)
- Be Polite
- Give Appreciations

Repair of a Fight or Regrettable Incident

Leading researcher John Gottman has come up with a tool to manage these conversations, taking us step by step through a process he terms “aftermath of a fight or regrettable incident.” If you do it right and follow the rules, you’ll be on the road to erasing the Zeigarnik Effect and balancing your positive to negative ratio.

1. Feelings – share how you felt, not why. And you can’t cheat by saying “I felt...that you acted like a crazy person.” You’re only looking for “I felt...scared, sad, angry, etc.”

2. Realities – describe your reality, summarize, and validate at least part of your partner’s reality.

3. Triggers – share what might have escalated the interaction, things from childhood or other relationships that triggered a bigger reaction for you

4. Responsibility – Acknowledge your role in contributing to the fight.

5. Constructive Plans – Plan one way that each of you can make it better next time.

The goal here is understanding, not proving that you’re right. Each of you has your own perspective, and you’re both right because your feelings are always valid, regardless of how far from reality you have taken them. There is always an understanding that can be reached. Remember – do you care more about your relationship, or being right?

The Magic Five Hours per Week, per John Gottman

Partings: Don't part in the morning without knowing one interesting thing that will happen in your partner's day that you can ask them about when you next see them. You can go your separate ways *after* a six-second kiss and an "I love you."

This only take 2 minutes a day for 5 working days. In total that's only 10 minutes of your time a week!

Reunions: Reunite with a six-second kiss, followed by a stress-reducing conversation in which each of you share your frustrations, anxieties, and a brief recap of what happened in your day. Remember, this is a time for you and your partner to engage in active listening and provide emotional support. *Rule:* Understanding must precede advice!

Spend 20 minutes a day for 5 days on reunions. Total is 1 hour and 40 minutes of your week.

Admiration and Appreciation: Find some way every day to genuinely communicate affection and appreciation toward your partner.

Dedicate 5 minutes a day to this for 7 days. Total of 35 minutes.

Affection: Kiss, hold, grab, touch! Playing together is a *good* thing, so don't forget to do it! Make sure to kiss each other before going to sleep and follow the admonition in Ephesians, "Do not let the sun set on your wrath."

Let it set on *affection* instead!

Spend 5 minutes of your day for 7 days on giving affection to your partner. This comes to a total of 35 minutes a week.

Love Maps: Make sure to update your love maps and use them to create opportunities to turn toward one another. Set aside time for a *date* with your partner to catch up on their life, resolve issues, and to just enjoy each other's company.

Spend a total of 2 hours a week having this quality time together.