

Psychological Warfare



Dr. John Gottman is a researcher that shares powerful insights and strategies about what makes relationships work and what doesn't. According to his research, there are four behaviors that are most predictive of marital conflict and ultimately, divorce. He called them The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

The Four Horsemen

1. Criticism – (telling the other person his or her faults). As the label suggests, this behavior is all about criticizing the other person. Although the criticism may start out as a complaint, it quickly turns into a personal attack. For example, it's one thing to complain and say "You never take the garbage out!" But, it's another thing when you insult the other person by saying: "You never take the garbage out because you're so lazy!"

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

2. Defensiveness – (denying responsibility, or refusing to discuss an issue the spouse regards as important) We all do things that our partners don't like. What leads to serious conflict is when we act defensively and avoid taking responsibility for any of our actions.

Examples:

- *"You should have reminded me."*
- *"It was the alcohol talking."*
- *"If you wouldn't have done 'X', I wouldn't have..."*
- *"Next time don't make me so mad."*

Gottman found that people who are always on the defensive create serious conflict in their relationship. They use:

- Insults and name-calling: "bitch, bastard, wimp, fat, stupid, ugly, slob, lazy..."
- Hostile humor, Belittling, dismissive, sarcasm or mockery

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- Body language, tone of voice: sneering, rolling your eyes, curling your upper lip

3. Contempt – (looking down on and despising another person) Trying to teach your partner a thing or two because you know better or making fun of or mocking your partner is contemptuous.

Other examples include:

- Publicly disrespecting or making them the butt of jokes
- Cross-complaining: meeting your partner's complaint, or criticism with a complaint of your own, ignoring or dismissing what your partner said as unimportant
- 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."
- Pulling rank, i.e.,
 - *"I know more than you..."*
 - *"I'm older than you..."*
 - *"You're just a ____, you don't know any better."*

Contempt is the best single predictor of divorce. Gottman's research predicted an 85% chance of divorce when a partner maintained and demonstrated *contempt*. He called it, "The sulfuric acid for love."

4. Stonewalling (emotionally and physically withdrawing) Withdrawing from the conversation while the other person is talking. Men tend to do this much more often than women. It's not about just physically removing yourself from the situation. It's about mentally and emotionally leaving the conversation. It's about divesting from the emotional pain of the relationship while passive-aggressively sticking it to your partner by denying them the satisfaction of basic feedback and acknowledgement. It looks like:

- Stony silence, showing no reaction
- Having a blank look, staring through or past the other
- The silent treatment
- Ceasing to care
- Monosyllabic mutterings, changing the subject
- Removing yourself physically
- Abruptly walking away

Damage Control

Every marriage or long-term committed relationship (even the "happy" ones) conducts psychological warfare and has some of the four horsemen galloping through their relationship. Damage control is about repairing damage and havoc of marital conflict and psychological warfare. Successful couples stay together because of their attempts

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at damage control. They make small and sometimes large investments in the form of repair attempts. They learn to turn towards each other and remain committed.

Growth within a relationship is rarely together or at the same pace. Growth is almost always unilateral; meaning one person at a time. It's like the childhood game of leap-frog. However each person's growth must be independent and not contingent on the other. The only way to help our partner grow is by removing the pressure and becoming a true example. We must master the skill-sets listed below in order to propel our relationship forward.

- Conscious communication:
 - Listening generously before speaking
 - Comment on the communication itself
 - Say what needs to be said and not what you think would make the other merely feel better or wants to hear
 - Demonstrating respect
- Appreciation
 - Soften complaints by expressing appreciation
 - Appreciate 5:1 (5 positive feelings & interactions to every 1 negative)
 - Speaking each other's love language
- Self-awareness
 - Validate yourself by developing a clarity of "self" especially in the presence of someone important to you
 - Validate your partner by letting them know you hear them and what makes sense to you about what they are saying
 - Use empathy to let them know you understand what they are feeling; see it through their eyes
- Self-Soothing
 - Calm your heart and quiet your mind if your ego or feelings get hurt; especially when you feel your character is being attacked
 - Accept responsibility:
 - What can I learn from this?
 - What can I do about it?
 - What part of this is my issue?
 - Self-soothe before you support and soothe each other
- Self-regulate
 - Avoid reacting to the reactivity of your partner; be proactive
 - Don't take their attacks personally
 - Listen instead of reacting to their anxiety
 - Avoid knee-jerk reactions to the reactivity of others
 - Don't unwittingly feed into a chain-reaction of emotions
- Self-endurance
 - Also know as long suffering and patience
 - Be willing to endure emotional discomfort for the sake of growth
 - Sometimes this involves tolerating the discomfort and disappointment of others

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Intimacy and Love

When couples become capable of repairing their own marriages, they no longer need a therapist. Essentially, they act as their own therapists. Just like having the capacity to launch a psychological war, couples also have the capacity to forge treaties, make alliances and conduct repairs. They can enjoy being on the same team while appreciating their fundamental differences.

It is my opinion that we get into committed relationships in order to have someone to fight with. Committed relationships force us to grow up. It propels us forward beyond our comfort zone. Growth is always just beyond our comfort level. Other than prison, there are few places that force us beyond our comfort zone like marriage. Sadly, for some, marriage is like being in prison. 😊

Psychological warfare keeps our partner at a tolerable emotional distance. Most couples are not mature enough to handle the demands of intimacy. They have not developed enough of a solid sense of self in order to withstand the emotional demands and needs from their partner.

Intimacy is not about me knowing you. It's about me being known by you. In to me see (intimacy); I want you to see me flaws and all. Too often most of us fear rejection and try to hide our flaws. We only present what is presentable. That becomes self-presentation and we try to pass it off as intimacy. In the spirit of fairness, our partner is doing the same thing. This is why in the mist of the warfare (relationship) we tend to say "I love you but I'm not in-love with you." The relationship is a farce perpetrated by self-presentation. We can only be "in-love" when the relationship is authentic.

True love is having the capacity and desire to say and truly mean "I give you all of me even with the risk of your rejection and you don't owe me anything in return." Loving someone is not for the weak. It takes strength of character to love someone unconditionally. There are no shortcuts to growth and maturity. Couple must go through the fray. In doing so; they will come out on the other side fully capable of intimacy and true love.

