**4 Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Conflict Warning Signs and Solutions**

**These four signs predict higher likelihood of breakups.**

1. Criticism: more than a complaint, attacking the person, rather than the behavior

* Examples: "What is wrong with you?" "You NEVER do the dishes."
* Troubleshooting: Use gentle start-up, Voice complaint without blame, Share your feelings
  + Examples: "I'm feeling hurt you didn't do the dishes; can we talk about that?"

2. Contempt: biggest predictor of divorce, speaking down to partner/insulting, name-calling

* Examples: "You're an idiot.", "Of course you didn't do the dishes."
* Troubleshooting: Validate your partner, Show appreciation for their positive behaviors
  + Examples: "Thank you for doing the dishes today.", "I'm proud of you."

3. Defensiveness: Unwilling to acknowledge fault, Counterattacking, Whining/playing the victim

* Examples: "It's not my fault; it's yours.", "But I didn't mean to."
* Troubleshooting: Accept responsibility for your part in the conflict
  + Examples: "Well part of this is my problem.", "I'm sorry I lashed out at you."

4. Stonewalling: Withdrawing from interaction/partner, Shutting down, Tuning out or acting busy

* Examples: "Uh huh. Sure. Yeah." "[Silence]"
* Troubleshooting: Practice physiological self-soothing, Take a break from the conflict
  + Examples: "I'm feeling overwhelmed. Can we revisit this in an hour?"

Abuse versus Conflict

Abuse

* Conflict is common and can be quite healthy.
* In fact, engaging in conflict can increase marital satisfaction over time!
* Conflict can help to learn more about others, build trust, & improve your relationship.

Conflict

* In contrast, abuse is damaging and less common.
* Abusive relationships tend to progress from subtle to more overt transgressions.
* As a result, it can be hard for victims to detect abuse.
* Anyone can be a victim! Any age, sex, race, religion, culture, education, employment, or relationship status.

Signs of Abuse: Does your partner?

* Constantly keep track of your time?
* Accuse you of being unfaithful or flirting?
* Act jealous and possessive?
* Discourage your relationships with others?
* Frequently criticize, threaten, or belittle you?
* Humiliate you privately or in front of others?
* Control your finances without your input?
* Act violently and lose their temper quickly?
* Physically harm &/or sexually coerce you?
* Withhold emotionally?
* Regularly lie and break promises?
* Blame you for their emotional state?

Cycle of Abuse

1. Tension building
   * Breakdown of communication
   * Victim becomes fearful, feels need to placate abuser
2. Incident
   * Verbal, emotional, &/or physical abuse
   * Anger, blaming, arguing
   * Threats/intimidation
3. Reconciliation
   * Abuser apologizes, gives excuses
   * Abuser minimizes or denies the abuse occurred
4. Calm
   * Incident is forgotten
   * No abuse is taking place
   * “Honeymoon phase”