

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”