LOVE NOTES
October 2026



The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

Meet the monsters of miscommunication

Decades of Gottman research has demonstrated four destructive communication patterns that can signal relationship breakdown if left unchecked. They're called The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

Spotting a horseman doesn't mean your relationship is cursed. These patterns can sneak into anyone's communication, especially when you're stressed, tired, or overwhelmed. The trick is learning to recognize them and reach for the antidote.

Read on to learn what's lurking in your conflicts and what you can do instead.



Criticism:

CASTING BLAME

Criticism can cast a spell over an entire conversation. It materializes as attacks on your partner's character or personality rather than addressing specific behavior or voicing a complaint.

It often starts with "You always...", "You never...", or "Why are you so...".

"You never help around the house, why are you so lazy!"

Criticism makes your partner feel attacked and defensive, setting off a negative cycle of blame and resentment.

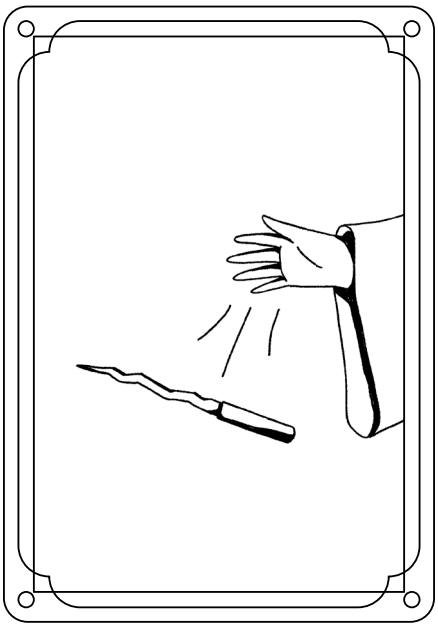
TRY THIS SPELL INSTEAD:

Use a Softened Start-Up

The first few moments predict how the rest of the conversation will go. Using a soft start-up with "I" statements instead of casting blame will make it more likely your conversation stays calm and productive.

"I feel overwhelmed by how messy the house is. I need you to clean up with me."

This shift focuses from personality fault to teamwork.





Contempt:

DRAINING AFFECTION

Contempt shows up as sarcasm, mockery, eye-rolling, sarcasm, or name-calling, often from a place of superiority. It's a form of disrespect. Over time, it can suck the warmth and affection right out of your interactions.

"Wow, great job leaving the laundry in the washer again. You're such a genius."

"Oh, please. You're being ridiculous."

"I can't believe I have to explain this to you again."

Contempt is the single biggest predictor of divorce. It erodes trust and connection, making your partner feel belittled and worthless.

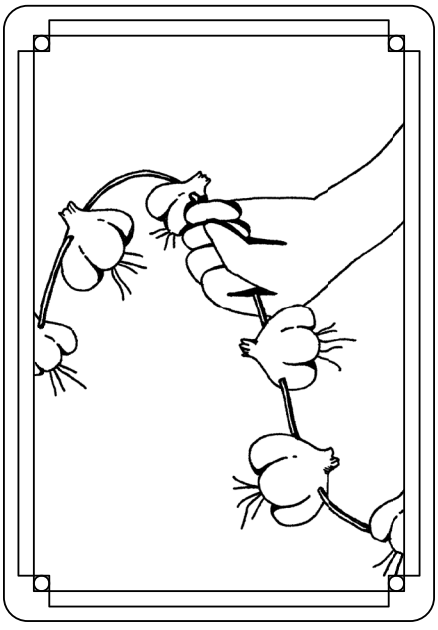
WARD OFF DANGER:

Build a Culture of Appreciation

Build a culture of appreciation by cultivating positive interactions, doing small daily acts of kindness, and verbalizing what you love and appreciate about each other.

"Thanks for making coffee this morning, it really helped me start my day."

"Thank you for remembering. I really appreciate it."



When appreciation becomes a habit, respect naturally replaces resentment.



Defensiveness:

CLAWS OUT WHEN THREATENED

When we feel blamed, it's natural to want to protect ourselves. But defensiveness can quickly transform a disagreement into a battle of accusations, excuses, and counterattacks.

Watch out for "Well you never...", "It's not my fault...", or "I only did that because you...".

"It hurts when you don't text me during the day."

"Well, you never text me first."

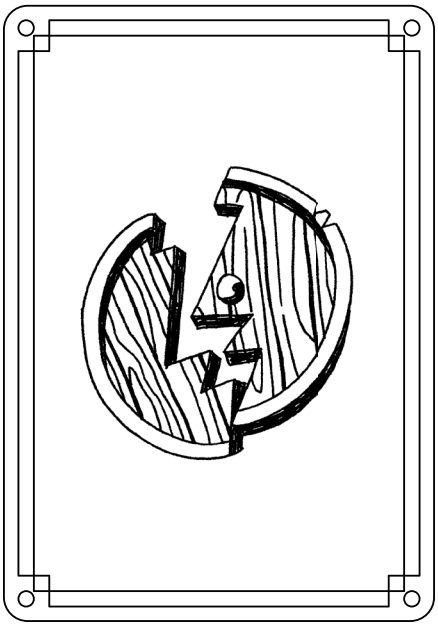
Defensiveness shuts down communication. Instead of addressing your partner's feelings, you place blame on them or make excuses, which escalates conflict.

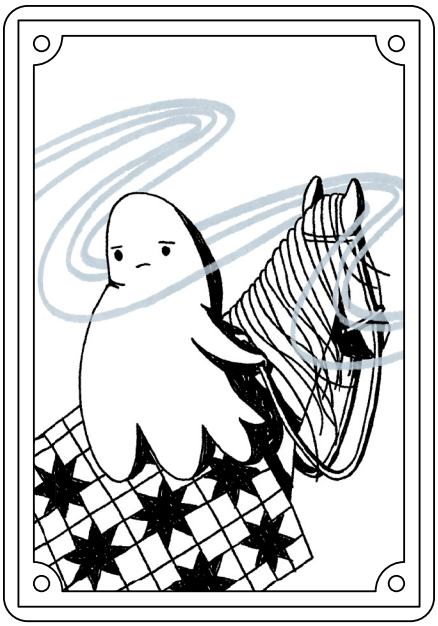
TAME THE BEAST:

Take Responsibility

"You're right, I should have let you know I was busy. I'll try to do this in the future."

Taking responsibility for your part lowers tension and shows maturity. It also invites your partner to do the same.





Stonewalling:

COMMUNICATION GRAVEYARD

When a conversation gets too intense, you might find yourself checking out. You go quiet, stop responding, avoid eye contact, or emotionally disappear from the conversation.

"I can't do this right now."

Crosses arms, looks away, or leaves the room.

It can seem like self-protection, but stonewalling sends the message that you don't care, which can deepen hurt and disconnection.

BANISH THE GHOSTS:

Physiological Self-Soothing

Oftentimes, individuals stonewall because they are overwhelmed. Taking a break can help, but be sure to communicate this to your partner. Calm your body for at least 20 minutes before continuing.

"I need a few minutes, let's take a break and come back to this."

Use this time to breathe, stretch, or listen to music. Anything that helps you calm and reset emotionally and physically.

