

# THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE

## ACCUSATIONS (Criticism)

Accusations are expressed in a destructive manner, as an attack on the other person's character: *"You're so thoughtless and self-centered!"*

In an accusation, you state specifically what is upsetting you and criticize the other person's action, not the person herself, saying how it made you feel.

## CONTEMPT (Disgust)

Contempt is usually expressed not in just words themselves, but also in a tone of voice and an angry expression: *rolling the eyes, a look of disgust.*

What distinguishes *contempt* is the intention to *insult and psychologically-abuse* the other person. When contempt begins to overwhelm the relationship, you tend to forget entirely the other person's positive qualities, at least when feeling upset. You cannot remember a single positive quality or act.

## DEFENSIVENESS

Defensiveness is the fighting-back response. Here, you refuse to take-in anything the other person is saying. It is one arm of the typical "fight-or-flight" response.

Defensiveness feels like an understandable reaction to feeling besieged – this is why it is so destructive. The "victim" does not see anything wrong with being defensive, even though this attitude escalates a conflict rather than leads to resolution. Defensive people never say, *"Maybe you're right,"* or *"I see your point,"* or *"Yeah, I get it. I think I owe you an apology."*

## STONEWALLING

Stonewalling is the ultimate defense. The stonewaller just goes blank and withdraws from the conversation. This sends a powerful message: icy distance, superiority, and distaste. Do not confuse stonewalling with time-out. Time-out communicates *respect*. The message is that you care enough about the relationship to make special efforts not to cause any further damage. And there is a very clear contract that the discussion *will* continue at a future time.

## HOW SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIPS WORK

Research indicates that successful relationships manage to express appreciation, soften complaints, respond non-defensively, back-down, and use humor.