

Good and Bad Communication Practices¹

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

There are four hostile forms of communication that put couples at high risk for divorce when these patterns take up permanent residence in the relationship.

1. **Criticism:** Blaming; attacking partner's personality or character (e.g., saying, "How can you be so selfish!").
2. **Contempt:** Showing disrespect, disgust or hostility (e.g., mocking, making sarcastic remarks, or rolling the eyes).
3. **Defensiveness:** Denying personal responsibility (e.g., denying having made an offensive statement or deflecting the partner's complaint).
4. **Stonewalling:** Refusing to reply or listen; withdrawing from interaction (e.g., leaving the room).

The Four Good Communication Skills

1. **Calming down:** Waiting until emotion has calmed down before discussing difficult issues.
2. **Complaining:** Expressing one's unhappiness about certain situation or behaviour without blaming the partner.
3. **Speaking non-defensively:** Using "I" or "we" statements; speaking honestly and rationally.
4. **Validating:** Validating or appreciating partner and partner's behaviour.

Implementing Eight Communication Skills: Tracking Sheet (Gottman, 1994)

<i>Target Behaviour</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>	<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Total</i>
1. Criticism								
2. Contempt								
3. Defensiveness								
4. Stonewalling								
5. Calming down								
6. Complaining								
7. Speaking non-defensively								
8. Validating								

¹Gottman, J. M. (1994). *Why marriages succeed or fail*. New York, NY: Fireside.

