

CHAPTER FIVE:

Unhealthy Communication

Communication forms the very threads that hold a relationship together. It's the bridge that connects partners, the medium through which understanding, empathy, and love flow. However, unhealthy communication can corrode the very foundation of a relationship.

In couples' relationships, unhealthy communication manifests in various forms, damaging the bond between partners. When one or both partners feels unheard or dismissed, it can create a rift in the relationship. Conversations often become monologues, with each party more focused on asserting their own perspective than understanding their partner's point of view.

Why is it Crucial to Recognize Toxic Communication Patterns?

1. Acknowledging the problem is the first step towards finding a solution. Ignoring or rationalizing unhealthy communication only perpetuates the cycle of dysfunction, leading to further deterioration of the relationship.
2. Unhealthy communication corrodes intimacy and emotional connection between partners. When communication breaks down, so does the foundation of trust and empathy upon which healthy relationships thrive. Without open and honest dialogue, couples drift apart, unable to bridge the growing distance between them.
3. Recognizing unhealthy communication also empowers individuals to set boundaries and assert their needs within the relationship. By identifying destructive patterns, couples can work together to establish healthier communication habits, fostering mutual respect and understanding.
4. Addressing communication issues early on can prevent conflicts from escalating into irreparable damage. By proactively addressing concerns and seeking constructive solutions, couples can navigate challenges with resilience and unity.

Ultimately, healthy communication is the lifeblood of any successful relationship. It's the catalyst for growth, intimacy, and lasting connection between partners.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse:

The four horsemen of the apocalypse are communication patterns that can lead to relationship breakdowns if left unchecked.

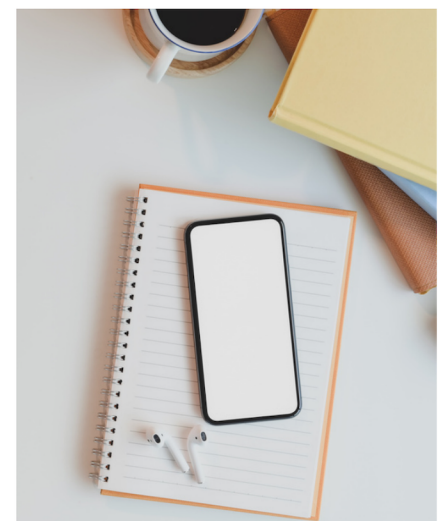
- 1. Criticism** is one of the most common negative communication patterns, and it involves attacking your partner's character or personality rather than addressing a specific behavior or action. Criticism can be highly destructive to a relationship, as it can lead to defensiveness, resentment, and feelings of inadequacy.
- 2. Defensiveness** is another negative communication pattern that can be highly damaging to a relationship. Defensiveness involves reacting with anger or excuses when your partner expresses a concern or complaint. Defensiveness can be a natural response when we feel attacked, but it can also be a way of avoiding responsibility for our own behavior.
- 3. Contempt** is perhaps the most toxic of all negative communication patterns, and it involves attacking your partner's sense of self-worth and value. Contempt can take many forms, from name-calling and insults to eye-rolling and sarcasm. When contempt is present in a relationship, it can be extremely difficult to create a positive and supportive environment.
- Finally, **stonewalling** is a negative communication pattern that involves withdrawing from a conversation or shutting down emotionally when things get difficult. Stonewalling can be especially frustrating for partners, as it can feel like they are being shut out and ignored.

The Four Communication Styles:

Passive-aggressive, passive, aggressive, and assertive are different communication styles that people use in their interactions with others.

Here's a brief overview of each style:

- 1. Passive-aggressive communication:** This style involves indirectly expressing negative feelings or thoughts towards others, often in a way that is not clear or direct. Passive-aggressive behavior can include things like sarcasm, silent treatment, or making veiled threats. Instead of openly addressing issues, passive-aggressive communicators may use these tactics to avoid confrontation and maintain a sense of control.
- 2. Passive communication:** This style involves avoiding conflict or expressing one's needs or opinions. Passive communicators tend to give in to the needs of others and may struggle with setting boundaries or asserting themselves. This can lead to feelings of resentment or being taken advantage of.
- 3. Aggressive communication:** This style involves expressing one's needs or opinions in a way that is forceful or confrontational. Aggressive communicators tend to dominate conversations, interrupt others, and may resort to name-calling or other tactics to get their way. This style can be intimidating and may lead to strained or damaged relationships.
- 4. Assertive communication:** This style involves expressing one's needs or opinions in a clear, direct, and respectful way. Assertive communicators are able to stand up for themselves while still respecting the needs and feelings of others. This style involves active listening, using "I" statements, and being willing to compromise or find solutions that work for everyone.



It's important to note that these communication styles are not fixed or permanent. People may use different styles in different situations, and some may be more effective than others depending on the context. However, being aware of these styles and practicing assertive communication can help individuals build healthier, more fulfilling relationships with others.

QUIZ #1

Recognizing the Four Horsemen in Your Relationships

Instructions: Both partners should take this quiz separately and then compare their answers to see if they are communicating with any of the four horsemen of the apocalypse. Answer each question with one of the following options: "Always," "Often," "Sometimes," "Rarely," or "Never."

1. Criticism

- I often criticize my partner's personality or character.
- I tend to use "you" statements when I talk to my partner, such as "you always" or "you never".
- I tend to bring up past mistakes my partner has made in our arguments.

2. Defensiveness

- I often get defensive when my partner brings up an issue.
- I tend to deny responsibility for my actions and blame my partner instead.
- I often feel attacked when my partner gives me feedback.

3. Contempt

- I often speak to my partner disrespectfully, such as with sarcasm or name-calling.
- I tend to roll my eyes or use other negative facial expressions when my partner is speaking.
- I often have thoughts or feelings of disgust or hatred towards my partner.

4. Stonewalling

- I often shut down or withdraw during arguments with my partner
- I tend to avoid eye contact and give short, non-committal responses when my partner is speaking.
- I often feel overwhelmed or flooded during arguments and need to take a break.

Scoring: For each question, give yourself four points for "Always," three points for "Often," two points for "Sometimes," one point for "Rarely," and zero points for "Never."

Add up your scores for each of the four sections (Criticism, Defensiveness, Contempt, and Stonewalling). If your score is 4 or higher in any of the four sections, then it may indicate that you are using that particular communication style with your partner..

QUIZ #2

Communication Styles

Instructions: For each question, select the response that best represents your typical behavior in that situation.

When your partner asks you to do something that you don't want to do, how do you usually respond?

- a) You agree to do it even though you don't want to
- b) You say yes, but you don't actually do it
- c) You refuse to do it
- d) You express your concerns and negotiate a compromise

When you disagree with your partner, how do you usually express your opinion?

- a) You don't express your opinion and go along with what your partner wants
- b) You express your opinion indirectly or with sarcasm
- c) You forcefully argue your point of view
- d) You express your opinion directly and respectfully

How do you typically respond when your partner criticizes you?

- a) You agree with the criticism and apologize
- b) You get defensive and make excuses
- c) You attack back and criticize your partner
- d) You listen to the criticism and use it as an opportunity for self-improvement

When you're feeling hurt or upset, how do you usually express your emotions to your partner?

- a) You keep your feelings to yourself
- b) You make snarky comments or use sarcasm
- c) You lash out and say hurtful things
- d) You express your feelings directly and calmly

When you're having a disagreement with your partner, how do you typically try to resolve it?

- a) You give in to your partner's demands to avoid conflict
- b) You make passive-aggressive comments and refuse to compromise
- c) You try to overpower your partner and get your way
- d) You work together with your partner to find a mutually acceptable solution

SCORING:

For each question, assign yourself one point for each of the following responses:

- a) Passive
- b) Passive-aggressive
- c) Aggressive
- d) Assertive

Add up your points for each style, and the style with the highest score represents your dominant communication style.

INTERPRETATION:

- If you scored highest in passive communication, you may have difficulty expressing your needs and feelings, and may struggle with self-assertion.
- If you scored highest in passive-aggressive communication, you may express your anger and frustration indirectly or through sarcasm, which can damage your relationship.
- If you scored highest in aggressive communication, you may have a tendency to be domineering and controlling, and may struggle to compromise with your partner.
- If you scored highest in assertive communication, you are able to express your needs and feelings directly and respectfully, and work with your partner to find mutually acceptable solutions to disagreements.

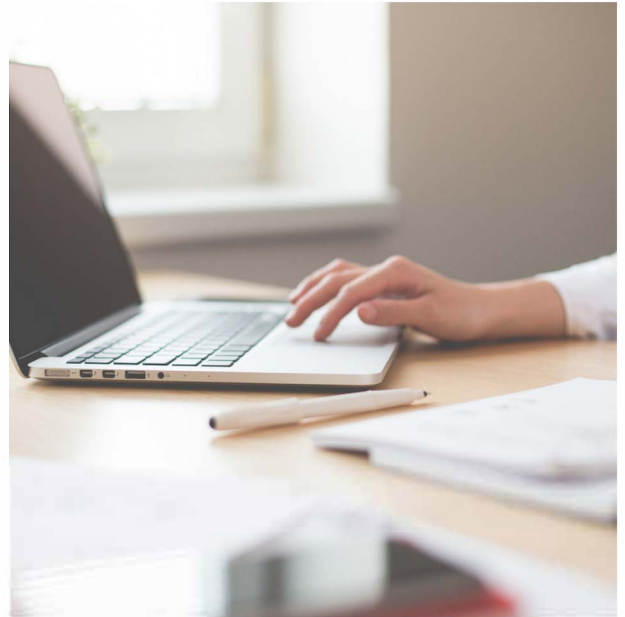
EXERCISE #1

Reflect on your Own Communication

1. Criticism: Do you use sweeping statements or global characterizations to attack the other person's behavior, personality, or character, rather than addressing specific issues?
2. Defensiveness: Do you react defensively to feedback, even when it is delivered in a calm and constructive manner?
3. Contempt: Do you use sarcasm, mockery, or insults to express contempt or disdain for the other person?
4. Stonewalling: Do you withdraw from conversations or disengage emotionally when conflicts arise, refusing to engage in communication or problem-solving?

Thank you!

This workbook is a testament to the power of partnership and growth within relationships. Remember that the journey of love and understanding is ongoing. Embrace the challenges and triumphs, communicate openly, and cultivate the love that brought you together. May this workbook serve as a tool to deepen your bond, strengthen your communication, and pave the way for a lasting, fulfilling partnership.



Does Your Relationship Need More Help?

Joseanne's full workbook is available for purchase on the Couple's Therapy Centre website

Purchase the full workbook