
THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Relationship conflicts are going to happen no matter what, but you want to be able to work through arguments in a healthy way. Now that you've watched the "Four Horsemen" video series, you can practice skills during low-level conflict situations. This will help prepare you and your partner prepare for the tougher conversations you'll have in the future.

PART ONE: CRITICISM

What does it look like?

- An attack on your partner's character or personality which can stem from pent up anger or unmet needs not expressed to your partner
- Different from a complaint, which addresses a specific behavior
- Use of generalizations like "always" or "never"

What helps overcome Criticism?

- Focus on one topic at a time
- Instead of describing your partner, describe your feelings or the situation (see Feeling Wheel on the last page)
 - Use the "Feelings Wheel" to help identify your emotions
 - Use "I" statements: "I feel [emotion] when [event]. Instead, I need [positive need]"
- Focus on validating each other's emotions before looking for solutions
- Communicate simply, softly and slowly
- Maintain a positive perspective about your partner

PART TWO: CONTEMPT

What does it look like?

- Expression of superiority, often paired with resentment and a lack of compassion which can stem from years of unresolved problems and feelings of disgust
- An intention to hurt your partner and make them feel worthless or lesser-than
- May include eye rolling, mockery, cynicism, sarcasm, or name calling behavior
- Number one predictor of relationship breakdown

What helps overcome Contempt?

- Address as soon as possible
- Consider individual counseling
- Build a culture of gratitude within the relationship by noticing your partner's positive actions and expressing appreciation
- Describe your own needs, not your partner
- Be curious about your partner's wants and need ("Tell me more." "Help me understand.")

PART THREE: DEFENSIVENESS

What does it look like?

- Response to the perception that you are being attacked
- Pushing blame to our partner which can escalate to a cycle of throwing blame back and forth
- Keeps us from resolving communication problems

What helps overcome Defensiveness?

- When you feel defensive, acknowledge it
- Own your part in the conflict which can help your partner feel understood and makes it easier for your partner to do the same
- Remember we don't have control over how we feel, but we do have control over how we respond and react to our feelings
- If defensiveness is a result of frustration due to a pattern of unwanted behavior, work together to brainstorm how to get unstuck by changing the pattern
- Stay calm and respectful with one another

PART FOUR: STONEWALLING

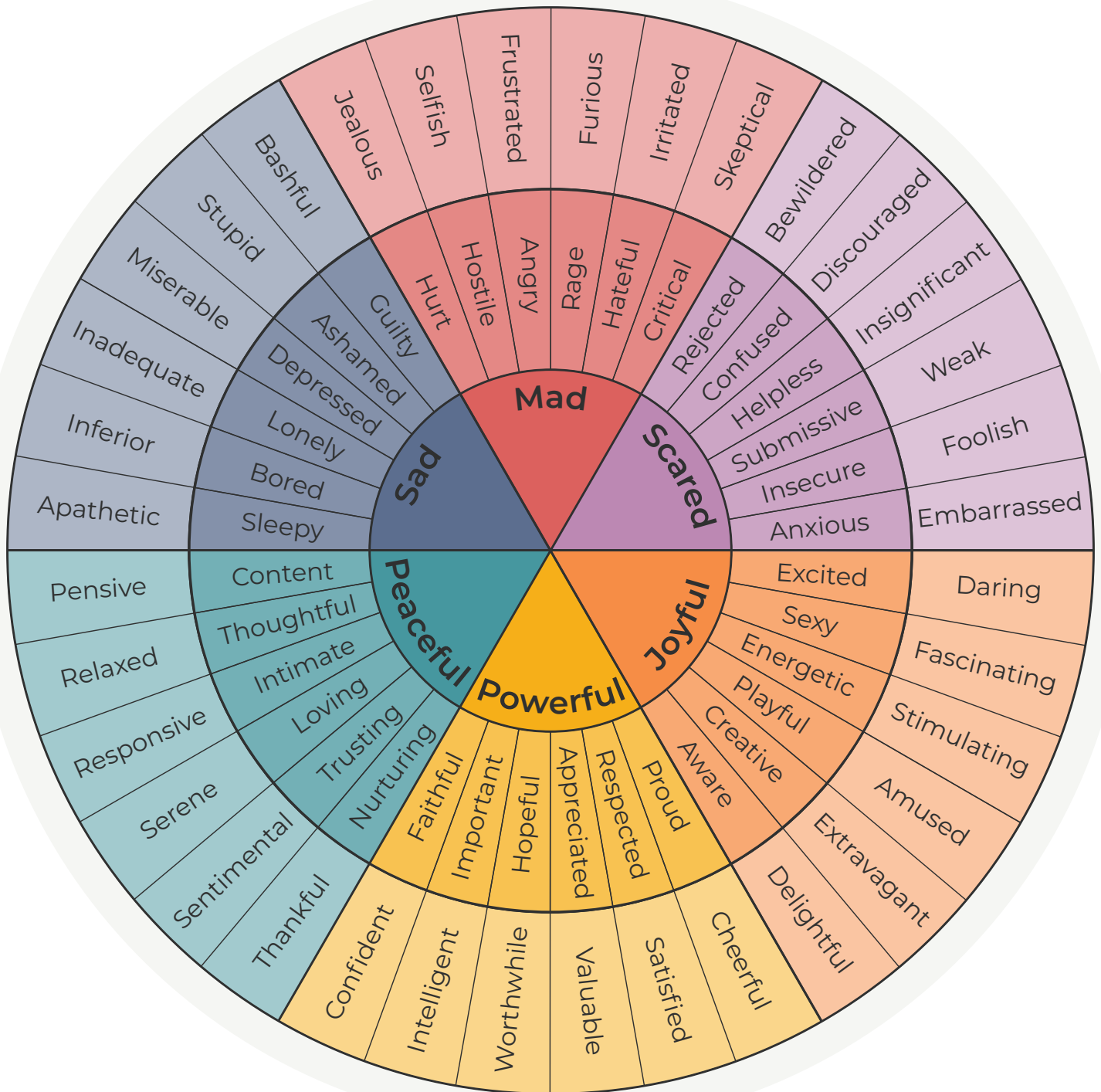
What does it look like?

- Shutting down during conversations which happens when our nervous systems are overwhelmed but isn't intentional (silent treatment)
- May look like disconnected body language, lack of eye contact, silence
- Potential signs include racing thoughts, rapid heart rate, difficulty breathing, mind going blank, getting overheated, feeling jittery, or feeling frozen in place

What helps overcome Stonewalling?

- Distraction can help calm the body: going for a walk, cuddling with a pet, watching a favorite show, or reading a book or a magazine
- Avoid ruminating on the conversation or using substances while trying to calm down
- Don't just walk away. Communicate - you need a break and set clear expectations about when the conversation will continue
- Be intentional about finishing the conversation
- Use "I" statements and remember to communicate simply, softly, and slowly
- Avoid having important conversations when feeling hungry, tired, or vulnerable. Feeling dysregulated makes it difficult to problem solve, think critically, and communicate

The Feeling Wheel



The Gottman Institute
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