

CONFLICT BLUEPRINT

STEP 1: LISTENING & VALIDATION

No one can engage in persuasion until both of you can state your partner's position to your partner's satisfaction. Slow down. Take turns as:

Speaker:

- No Blaming, no "you" statements.
- Talk about your feelings.
- Use only "I" statements about a specific situation.
- State **positive** need. Within every complaint, there is a longing and a recipe.

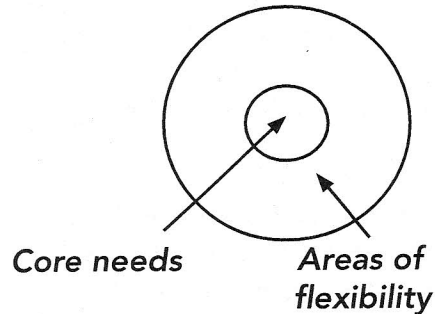
Listener:

- Postpone your own agenda. Hear and repeat the content of the speaker's needs and perspective (the story).
- Hear speaker's feelings (name emotions, feel them).
- **Validate** speaker by completing the sentence, "It makes sense to me that you would feel that way and have these needs, because..."
- OK to ask questions.

FLOODED?

Take a break, self-soothe.

STEP 2: COMPROMISE & PROBLEM-SOLVING



This is where persuasion belongs. To feel safe, first identify your core need and help your partner understand why it is core. Then compromise on areas of flexibility.

STEP 3: DREAMS WITHIN CONFLICT

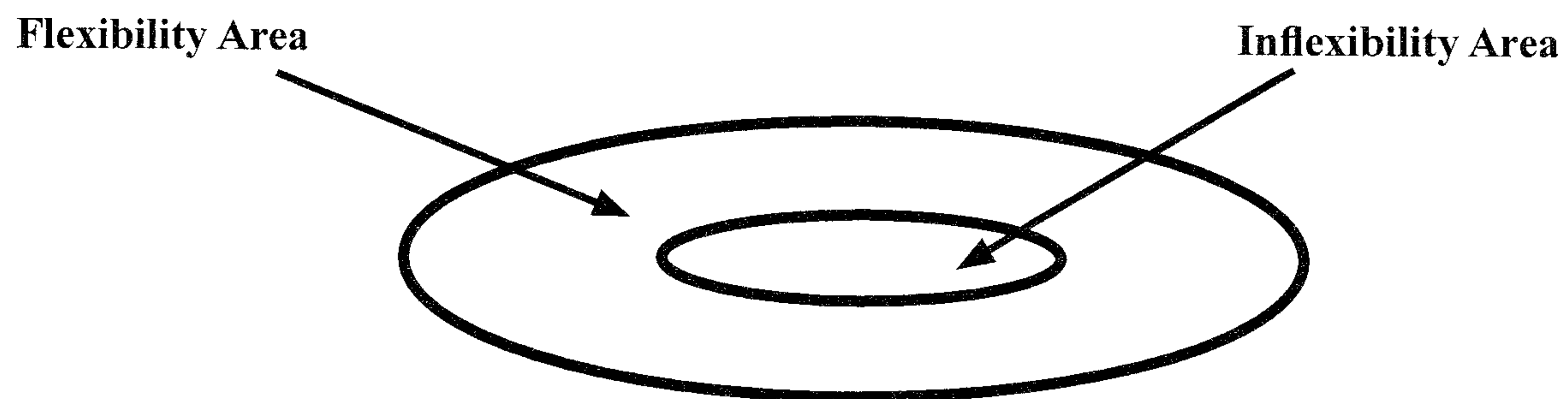
Gridlock and perpetual problems: What is the meaning behind each person's position? Honor one another's dreams. The goal here is Dialogue, understanding, and the acceptance of enduring personality differences.

STEP 4: THE AFTERMATH OF REGRETTABLE INCIDENTS

Process the incident. Don't get back into it. There are two valid realities. Understand and validate your partner's reality.

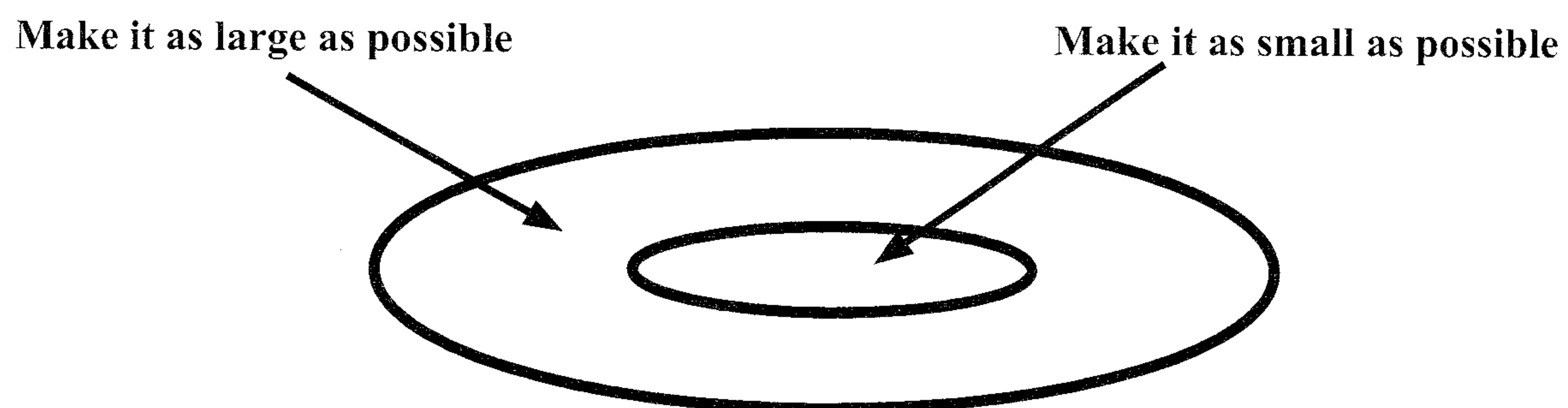
Rapoport's assumption of similarity.

When you identify a negative quality in your partner, try to see that very quality in yourself. When you identify a positive quality in yourself, try to see that very quality in your partner.

DIVIDE YOUR POSITION INTO TWO AREAS:

For this to work, you must use the Aikido principle: Yield to Win. In the Japanese martial art, Aikido, the idea is that direct opposition, i.e., two forces opposed, is a big mistake. We must yield to win. The truth for relationships is this:

YOU CANNOT BE INFLUENTIAL UNLESS YOU ACCEPT INFLUENCE



You may need a third circle that describes your common goals and common ground. You may need to talk about your fears, or nightmares about accepting influence. The therapist can help the couple arrive at a temporary compromise by talking about these areas as needed.

Dreams-Within-Conflict

**Work On A Gridlocked or Perpetual Problem:
Help Your Partner Understand the Underlying Dreams,
History, Beliefs or Values in Your Position On This Issue**

One person will be the Speaker and the other the Listener for 15 minutes: then you'll change roles.

SPEAKER'S JOB: Your task is to honestly talk about your feelings and beliefs about your position on this issue. Explore what this position means to you, what the dream might be behind your position, tell the story of the source of this **dream** or this belief: where it comes from and what it symbolizes. You must be clear and honest. What do you *really* want on this issue? Why is it important to you? Try to make your partner understand.

Don't argue for nor try to persuade your partner of your point of view; just explain how you see things. Tell your partner all of your thoughts and feelings that you have about your position on this issue.

You may want to look over the list on the following page for a sample of dreams that people sometimes have (or have lost) that could underlie the position you have taken on this issue.

LISTENER'S JOB: Your job here is to make your partner feel **SAFE** enough to tell you what's behind their position on the issue: their belief, dream or story. Toward this end, you will **LISTEN**, the way a friend would listen. **Ask the questions** that are listed on the next page as sample questions for the dream catcher which draw out your partner and his or her point of view. You can contribute to this climate if you **suspend judgment** and don't act like a judge but like someone who wants to hear your partner's story, and the dream behind the story. Just hear it and don't judge it.

Don't try to solve the problem. It is much too soon for that. You first need to end the opposition of dreams and become one another's friend instead of one another's foe. Try to understand the meaning of your partner's dream. Be interested.

*It is important to realize that the goal is not to solve these problems.
The goal is to move from gridlock to dialogue, and to understand,
in depth, their partner's position..*

Do not argue for your point of view! Just listen and ask questions.

We have found that women have usually been socialized to not honor any dream for themselves that isn't about relationships. Dreams related to being a good mother, partner, daughter, sister, helper, or friend are okay. Thus, many women are conflicted internally. On the one hand they believe that they are entitled to develop as separate autonomous individuals, and that any dream is okay as long as it is consistent with their moral choices. On the other hand, they have been raised to believe that fulfilling their own dreams is selfish and bad. Hence, we find many women who end up suppressing their own dreams. They need help to identify and hold on to their dreams.

The second step in this process is helping the couple "honor" one another's dreams. We use the word "honor" very deliberately here. Honoring implies a hierarchy in the extent to which one partner can support the other's dreams. At the lowest level there might be interest, respect, and words of encouragement. At the highest level there is a joining in the partner's dream and teamwork to fulfill it. But honoring need not be a fixed state. Partners may want their own autonomy in their pursuit of a dream, not a joining together to fulfill it. That is fine. It may change over time, although it doesn't have to. But each partner, at the least, has to respect their partner's dream, and each partner has to arrive at this independently. You can't do it for them any more than you can clear up their existential questions about God. In other words, you can create the conditions for them to be able to do this themselves, but ultimately they have to do it. Honoring their dreams and each other's dreams is not your responsibility. Getting them to any level of honoring one another's dreams is the goal. They may not stay there, but our experience is that as they talk about this issue over time, they will find new ways of honoring one another's dreams.

Sometimes this whole process will take years. So all you are doing is starting them on a new trajectory. They will do the work necessary to move along that path in a way that is consistent with their personalities. Remember, they will not solve the problem, they will just move off gridlock and onto a path toward dialogue with this perpetual problem.

This second step may require changing the couple influence patterns on their perpetual issue. This is not difficult to do for a short time, but it is hard to maintain these changes. The Dream-Within-Conflict interventions may need to be repeated multiple times.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS for the Dream Catcher (the listener):

- ①. What do you believe about this issue?
- ②. Is there a story behind this for you?
- ③. Does this relate to your background in some way?
- ④. Tell me why this is so important to you.
5. What do you feel about it?
6. What do you wish for?
- ⑦. What would be your ideal dream here?
8. What do you need?
9. Is there a deeper purpose or goal in this for you?
10. Does this relate to some belief or value for you?
11. Is there a fear or disaster scenario in not having this dream honored?

SAMPLE DREAMS for the Dream Speaker:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. A sense of freedom | 20. Exploring an old part of myself I have lost |
| 2. The experience of peace | 21. Getting over a personal hang up |
| 3. Unity with nature | 22. Having a sense of order |
| 4. Exploring who I am | 23. Being able to be productive |
| 5. Adventure | 24. A place and a time to just "be" |
| 6. A spiritual journey | 25. Being able to truly relax |
| 7. Justice | 26. Reflecting on my life |
| 8. Honor | 27. Getting my priorities in order |
| 9. Unity with my past | 28. Finishing something important |
| 10. Healing | 29. Exploring the physical side of myself |
| 11. Knowing my family | 30. Being able to compete and win |
| 12. Becoming all I can be | 31. Travel |
| 13. Having a sense of power | 32. Quietness |
| 14. Dealing with my aging | 33. Atonement |
| 15. Exploring a creative side of myself | 34. Building something important |
| 16. Becoming more powerful | 35. Ending a chapter of my life |
| 17. Getting over past hurts | 36. Saying goodbye to something |
| 18. Becoming more competent | 37. Love |
| 19. Asking God for forgiveness | |

The bottom line about dreams is this: You don't want to have the kind of relationship in which you win and are influential in the relationship but wind up crushing your partner's dream. You want the kind of relationship in which each of you support one another's dreams. If your dreams connect, so much the better.

6.4.4. Conflict: Goal #4 Develop Six Skills

In all conflict, the creation of constructive conflict management includes the development of the following skills:

1. Soften Startup
2. Accept Influence
3. Make Effective Repairs During Conflict
4. De-escalate
5. Compromise
6. Do Physiological Soothing of Self and Partner

In the process of dealing with conflict by having the couple talk about what they feel and need on a particular issue, you will be working on the six skills listed above. We will introduce you to these skills.

Soften Startup.

This skill involves how a partner raises an issue in the first three minutes of the conversation. You coach the partner to speak in terms of “I”, not “you”. The partner needs to state what he or she feels, then the facts about the situation engendering his or her feelings, and finally, what he or she needs or wishes to correct the situation. This method of beginning a problem discussion replaces old patterns of harsh start-up which usually involve criticism or contempt. Example: Harsh start-up: “You’re such a slob. Why don’t you clean up after yourself?” Softened start-up: “I’m upset that there are dirty dishes all over the counter. Would you please wash them?”

Accept Influence.

This skill is based on one partner being helped to accept influence from his or her partner. This can look as simple as teaching the partner to say, “Good point.” It also helps to support each partner to fully listen to the other before offering his or her own point of view.

Make Effective Repairs During Conflict.

Here, you aid the couple to keep their conflict conversations on the right track through a list of particular phrases designed to repair things when the discussion starts to deteriorate.

*Violent partners never accept influence, predicts demise
Research shows men who do research get more choices/sex*

Clinician's toolkit.

*point out, it will feel phony because not their own words
good alternatives*

6.4.2. Conflict: Goal #2
Eliminate the Four Horsemen and Replace Them
With Their Antidotes

Make Sure You Label Destructive Patterns: Don't ignore them! Build in the antidotes.

This down-regulates escalating quarrels. When labeling each of the four horsemen build in its ANTIDOTE.

One of the first things that we think you need to do is to label and try to stop destructive interaction patterns. This means directly telling people about the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, helping them to identify these behaviors, and explaining to them that these behaviors are consistent predictors of divorce. It also means not proceeding with the work of therapeutic change while ignoring these behaviors. That is, for example, do not ignore a partner's contempt and try to empathize with the disappointment and hurt that may underlie the contempt. We suggest that you call it contempt, and tell the couple that this behavior is unacceptable. Here are the four horsemen and their antidotes:

Criticism. The definition of criticism is stating one's complaints as a defect in one's partner's personality, that is, giving the partner negative trait attributions. *The antidote is to use Gentle Start Up, i.e. to talk about one's feelings using I-statements and then express a positive need.* A positive need is the hope, wish, desire, and the positive recipe that can help the partner to be listened to. Clients should be given the following structure: First, the partner talks about what s/he feels, then what the feeling is about, described in a neutral, objective and factual fashion without blame. Then the client states his or her need. In summary, the antidote is:

- I Feel *or upset / stressed / hurt*
- About What
- I Need

Example: Criticism: You always talk about yourself. You are so selfish. Antidote: I'm feeling left out by our talk tonight. Would you please ask me about my day?

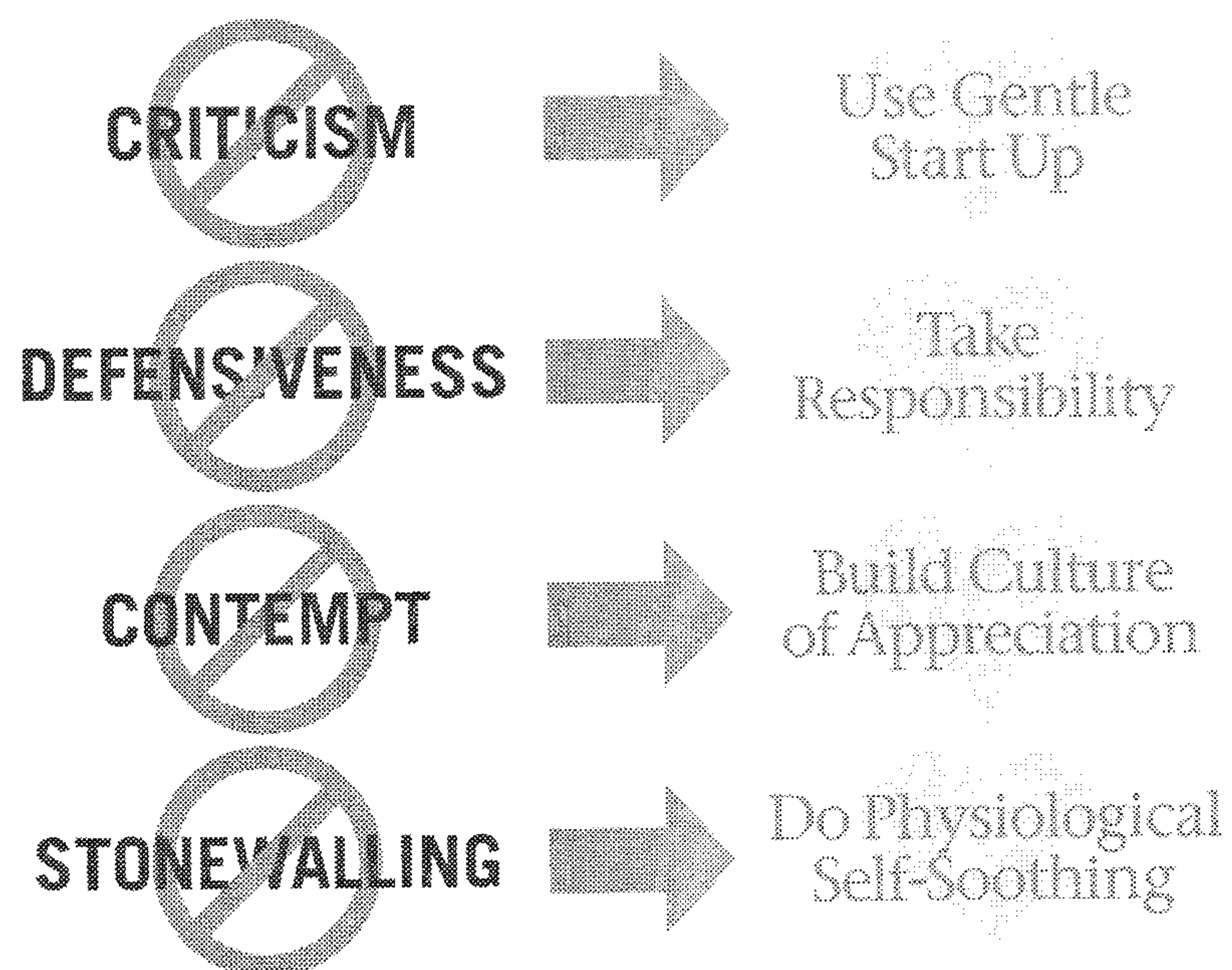
Defensiveness. Self-protection in the form of righteous indignation or innocent victim-hood. Defensiveness wards off a perceived attack. *The antidote is accepting responsibility for even a part of the problem.* Example: It's not my fault that we're always late, it's your fault. Antidote: Well, part of this is my problem, I need to think more about time.

Contempt. Statements that come from a relative position of superiority. Contempt is the greatest predictor of divorce and must be eliminated. *The antidote is for the couple to build a culture between them of appreciation and respect.* Example: You're an idiot. Antidote: I'm proud of the way you handled that teacher conference.

Stonewalling. Emotional withdrawal from interaction, for example, the listener not giving the speaker the usual nonverbal signals that the listener is tracking the speaker. *The antidote is for the partner to self-soothe in order to stay emotionally connected to their partner.*

What follows are examples of the wrong way versus the right way to handle the Four Horsemen in couple therapy:

Stop the Four Horsemen with their Antidotes



Aftermath of a Fight or a Regrettable Incident

This form is a guide for processing what happened after a fight or regrettable incident. This form is designed to try to increase understanding between the two of you. The idea here is that there is no absolute "reality" when two people miss each other in turning toward one another, or turning away, but only two "subjective realities." Everyone is right. Processing means talking about what happened without getting back into it, and finding one way to make this kind of interaction better in the future. Try to make it your job to understand your partner's reality, not argue for your own reality.

Talk About and Accept What You Were Each Feeling

I FELT:		
1. defensive.	17. I was right and you were wrong.	32. I was overwhelmed with emotion.
2. not listened to.	18. both of us were partly right.	33. not calm.
3. feelings got hurt.	19. out of control.	34. stubborn
4. totally flooded	20. frustrated	35. powerless.
5. angry.	21. righteously indignant.	36. I had no influence.
6. sad.	22. both morally justified.	37. I wanted to win this one.
7. unloved	23. unfairly picked on.	38. my opinions didn't even matter.
8. misunderstood.	24. unappreciated.	39. There was a lot of give and take.
9. criticized.	25. disliked	40. I had no feelings at all.
10. took a complaint personally.	26. unattractive.	41. I had no idea what I was feeling.
11. like you didn't even like me.	27. stupid	42. lonely.
12. not cared about.	28. morally outraged.	43. alienated.
13. worried.	29. taken for granted.	44. I was inflexible
14. afraid.	30. like leaving.	
15. unsafe.	31. like staying and talking this through.	
16. tense.		

Discuss and Validate Each Subjective Reality

Take turns. Talk about how you each saw the situation, what your perspective was. Focus on your feelings and the needs you had in this situation (perhaps unexpressed). Try to listen compassionately. When your partner is done, try to communicate that you understand some of his or her perspective. Validate.

Accept Responsibility

What role did you play in this fight? (Admitting Mode)

WHAT SET ME UP		
1. I've been very stressed and irritable lately.	8. I've been more typically turning away.	15. I've not asked for what I need.
2. I've not expressed much appreciation toward you lately	9. I've been getting easily upset.	16. I've been feeling a bit like a martyr.
3. I've taken you for granted.	10. I've been depressed lately.	17. I've needed to be alone.
4. I've been overly sensitive lately.	11. I had a chip on my shoulder lately.	18. I've not wanted to take care of anybody.
5. I've been overly critical lately.	12. I've not been very affectionate.	19. I have been very preoccupied
6. I've not shared very much of my inner world.	13. I've not made time for good things between us.	20. I have been very stressed lately
7. I've not been emotionally available.	14. I've not been a very good listener lately.	21. I haven't felt very much confidence in myself
		22. I have been running on empty

Identify the triggers for each of you: What escalated the interaction?

Put in your own words what escalated the interaction for you. These are often old and familiar feelings. Here are some categories:

WHAT TRIGGERED ME		
I felt excluded	I felt uncared for	This felt so unfair to me
I felt powerless	I felt lonely	I had trouble with your anger or yelling
I felt not listened to	You weren't there for me when I was vulnerable and needed you	I had trouble with your sadness or despair
I couldn't ask for what I needed	I couldn't just talk about my feelings without you going ballistic	I felt trapped
I felt scolded	Once again I was the bad guy and you were innocent	I felt you had no passion for me
I felt judged	I was not getting taken care of very well	I couldn't ask for what I needed
I felt blamed		I felt unloved
I felt disrespected		I felt controlled
I felt no affection		I felt manipulated
I felt unsafe		

Understand Why These Are Triggers.

Rewind the "videotape" of your life in your mind. Stop at an incident you remember from your childhood or past in general (not in this relationship) in which you got triggered in the same way or had some of these very same feelings as you did this time.

- Tell the story of that incident, how it happened, what you felt.
- Listen to your partner's story with empathy.

Overall, What Was Your Contribution to the Fight?

Figure Out How To Make It Better Next Time.

- What is one way that your partner can make it better next time this kind of incident happens again?
- What's one way that you can make it better next time?