

# Homework for Contempt

## Appreciation and the 4 Horsemen

**Goal:** Confront yourself every single time that you use any of the 4 Horsemen (See John Gottman PhD on YouTube for a refresher on the four horsemen).

Then *repair the damage you caused*. Apologize for your behavior, not for their feelings. Apologize sincerely that your behavior hurt their feelings. Work towards 100% of the time being able to communicate without using one of the four horsemen.

**Contempt** is generally frowned on in a relationship.

When you tell your partner that they are doing it wrong, does that strategy work for you?

When you criticize your partner, do they correct their behavior and do it the way you want to?

When you tell them that you are better than them, how do they react?

***Just because you have a different opinion, point of view or perspective, does not mean they have to do it your way.*** Judging them and criticizing them are ways that you demonstrate your contempt for them. We all have contempt at times and need to work on reducing it.

How are you working on a culture of acceptance instead of a culture of contempt, in your relationship?

I want you to picture this in your head- You have just shown your partner that you have contempt by being judgmental or critical of them. They feel your contempt and you realize your error.

Picture yourself correcting the experience. Picture yourself apologizing for your words, how your words impacted your partner and picture yourself genuinely promising to work on stopping that behavior. Every time you do it, you catch yourself earlier and earlier until it remains just inside your head, but it is silent. You think the judgy thought, you have critical ideas and they don't come out, because there is no good reason for them.

Every single time they occur, you recognize that you are the one who needs to work on it. You expressing contempt will destroy the relationship and cannot help it in any way. You know this

and you remind yourself of that. Imagine the look of pride on your partner's face when they see you being this disciplined on something this important to the relationship.

They look proud of you and they know how hard it is to have self-discipline when it comes to emotions. Well done. Repeat this visual in your head a few times so that your natural response is to repair the damage you caused or better yet, you stop yourself from hurting the relationship.

**Note:** Pay attention to what factors here contribute to greatness? Is it not making mistakes or is it *how you come back after a mistake?*

When the pressure is on can you stay out of contempt?

What makes it more likely that you will use criticism or judgment to express your contempt for your partner?

What hot spots or wounds do you have that cause you to react poorly with contempt?

What stops you from building a culture of appreciation so strong that contempt doesn't even occur to you?

Heal yourself and your wounds and watch how much easier it is.

**Check out your assumptions, rather than react.** Go back over the clarification and validation homework. Do it for real and do it again if you still struggle with it. When you feel hurt, try to use validation and clarification rather than hit below the belt.

**The Four Horsemen are essentially hitting below the belt**-common mistakes that we make when we are angry and arguing and don't restrain ourselves. When you make the error, own it, acknowledge it, apologize and get back on track. Train yourself not to hurt your partner and to not even think about hitting below the belt. "Winning at all costs" is not something that happens in the best relationships. No dirty tricks or hitting below the belt of people you love and respect. Develop a profound appreciation and sense of gratitude for your loved one and it becomes more challenging to hit below the belt.

**Defensiveness:** You got feedback.

Did it fit?

Did you appreciate it and use it?

**Take responsibility for your defensiveness.**

You have other options even when you believe you are justified to be defensive. You can choose alternatives, because you have power. Do not give your power away by being defensive.

Even if you think they were attacking you, did defensiveness solve the problem?

What improved as a result of you being defensive?

Go back and look at how you over reacted. There is your wound. Heal it. Not sure how?

Restructure it in your head. Look at the problem as you see the problem and determine if that was the only perspective available to you.

If it hurt, feel the pain, acknowledge it, validate it for yourself and see if that makes it easier to move on. You might need more time with it to teach you what it came to teach you.

You might need thicker skin or a bandaid until it is fully healed.

What happens the next time that the wound is touched?

If you are still overreacting, then you need to do more healing. Talk about this with a counselor to see if it is something that needs to be relived and released or not.

**Visualize:** Someone says something to you and you can feel your body react and then the story in your head is that they were attacking you.

You tell yourself that if they are attacking, you have the right to defend yourself. Then you realize that what you are doing is not healthy or productive. You stop yourself from defending your feelings, which don't really need defending.

You can't really be hurt, just your ego.

This person doesn't hate you and you are probably misunderstanding something. Go back and clarify with them, once you have a little bit of calm in you.

Can you clarify and truly understand them?

Can you listen or do you need to talk first?

Do you need to tell them that the story in your head is that they are attacking you and you want them to reassure you that they are not attacking?

Validate your own perspective once you have acknowledged your feelings- you do not need others to validate- that is a bonus if it happens. Feel your feelings and let them go, let them disappear or evaporate when they are done.

You love this person and are reconciling what they said/did with how you feel. Maybe they said something that hit home. Maybe you need to take responsibility for something you did and that is what they are confronting you about.

**Take responsibility for your part.**

Tell them how you are taking responsibility. Practice this before you have your next confrontation.

Practice pausing before you respond to anyone and ask for a time out if you are feeling defensive so that you don't sabotage.

What would you do differently next time to be effective?

What wounds do you need to heal so that you are less defensive?

**Criticism:** Never seems to work.

Only makes the recipient upset with you.

Doesn't really make you feel better because you expect them to change simply because you told them to (as if you are their teacher or boss or parent- but you are their partner, their equal- not their better).

When you are completely perfect in every way, you are entitled to criticize.

Until then, look for a more effective way to get your point across. "The beatings will continue until morale improves," is a cute saying that illustrates this point.

**Visualize:** You find yourself wanting to criticize or judge someone.

You find yourself less than appreciative or grateful of your partner.

What do you do with those thoughts and feelings?

Tell yourself that you don't care about them or their feelings and you don't care that you are likely to damage them and the relationship. Entertain whether or not you want to just indulge yourself and criticize.

Are you really that self-centered?

Are you without fault?

What would happen if, instead of criticizing, you stopped yourself and felt your feelings with full empathy and then had some self compassion?

What if you validated your own feelings after you acknowledged them?

Gottman talks about asking for your need to be met instead of just alienating them with a complaint.

What is your criticism? Turn it inside out and describe your need instead. You are much more likely to get a better response with a need than with a complaint.

Picture the look on your partner's face as they see you apologize for a poorly timed criticism and they see you trying to repair by asking for a need instead.

Imagine how proud you are that you have been able to get your need met without hurting your loved one. Practice this a few times and interrupt the urge to criticize, judge, complain etc.

**Stonewalling:** Is basically not talking to the person mid sentence instead of telling them that you are overwhelmed emotionally and cannot do this right now.

When you can, you owe it to them to come back and initiate the conversation.

Calm yourself down during your time out so that within a few hours or less you are able to continue the discussion successfully.

People will feel ignored when you give them the silent treatment, so be careful. Usually, the person who is stonewalling is attempting to get some space so they don't feel trapped and they are avoiding blowing up or saying awful things to their partner. Let them be and let them get away- don't corner them or bad things happen.

"I am really angry at you right now. What you did/said really hurt and I can tell I am not going to behave properly if I stay and talk this out. I need some time to settle down and gather my thoughts. I need to get closure on this when I come back."

But most people are not that articulate at this point of the argument. Their heart rate might be above the 100 bpm wherein the neocortex shuts down and they are unable to think straight. All they have left is the reptile brain that wants to hurt you. Let them go and settle down, please.

**Visualize:** You can tell you are about to blow your top.

Stop yourself and take three deep breaths.

Tell your partner- "I am about to blow my top. I feel really hurt right now and need to calm down by myself. I need space right now and it might be a few hours. I would like to talk about this later."

Then picture yourself taking a walk or lying down for a nap or going to the gym or doing something to calm your heart rate down. Picture yourself going up to your partner and telling them what happened from your perspective and asking what happened from their perspective after you feel heard.

Talk about how to make the conversation more productive next time.

Promise to work on noticing earlier in the process of feeling overwhelmed so that you can stay present and be in the moment rather than need to withdraw. Recognize that is a lot of work on your triggers and on keeping yourself calm. Also recognize that sometimes a time out is the very best thing to do and walk that through with your partner.

**Practice:** Practice the things that will improve your outcomes.

Improve your level of appreciation and decrease your level of contempt.

Did you write down the feedback you got?

What is your plan to incorporate it or did you get defensive?

Plan to use the feedback right away.

"I just did that with contempt. I will change that right away."

**Homework:** How many consecutive days can you appreciate your partner?

So you have read the above but have you done the necessary repetitions?

**Practice it- *do the hard work of the practice***- keep yourself on track for a minimum of 5 reps and review your results. Make necessary adjustments then do 10 more repetitions and review and fine tune what you still need.

Go ahead and give yourself feedback and add the next steps- add mental rehearsal every day for a month and watch how this changes. Put it in your phone if you need to remind yourself. What worked well (evidence) and what needs improvement? What is your feedback loop for when you think you are done with the repetitions and you have achieved the result?

Reward for process is...

Reward for result is...

**Self-Motivation** when getting discouraged i will motivate myself by putting myself in a good mood and visualize myself crossing the finish line of this challenge and when I cross it my future self will be applauding me