

Shrink Rap: Save your marriage: Part 1

Dr. John Gottman conducted research at the University of Washington in Seattle for sixteen years. He observed couples' communication. He looked at facial expression, tone of voice, choice of words, and body language. He measured heart and breathing rates as well as blood adrenaline levels as indicators of feeling stressed in those communications.

What he learned was, from those observations, he could predict divorce with a whopping 91% accuracy. Based on his analysis of a couples' interactions with one another he predicted fifteen of 130 couples would divorce within seven years.

He has boasted that he “can predict whether a couple will divorce after watching and listening to them for just fifteen minutes.” He had six indicators: A Harsh Start Up, The Four Horsemen, Flooding, Body Language, Failed Repair Attempts, and Bad Memories.

Gottman's research indicates couples who allowed their negative thoughts and feelings to overwhelm their positive feelings, were most likely to divorce.

On the other hand, those who had a positive attitude toward one another – who had a sense of romance, playfulness, fun, adventure, and learning to grow -- were most likely to stay happily married.

Gottman's first indicator of predicting divorce is “A Harsh Start Up.” He says this is when the conversation starts with accusations, negativity, sarcasm, blaming, criticism, or other hostility.

The second indicator, “The Four Horsemen” are certain types of negativity; they are lethal to relationships. The Four Horsemen are:

1. Criticism. Such as “can't you remember anything” or “you are so careless.” It gives the message that there is something wrong with YOU.
2. Contempt. Contempt gives a message of superiority over your partner. It is a form of disrespect, and includes body language of eye rolling, name-calling, mockery, challenging, and comparing with condescension.
3. Defensiveness. Tabulating your defenses, reasons, putting up a shield, digging in the heels, and closing the door to other perspectives.
4. Stonewalling. Disengaging, pretending someone does not exist, tuning out, turning away.

Check yourself. Are you doing any of the Four Horsemen in your relationships? More on Dr. Gottman's research and how to save your marriage in the coming weeks.

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